

BLAZING THE TRAIL THROUGH THE AIR FROM CONTINENT TO
CONTINENT WITH THE SKYWAY PALS. *THRILLING FLYING
TALE TO-DAY.*

Boys' Magazine

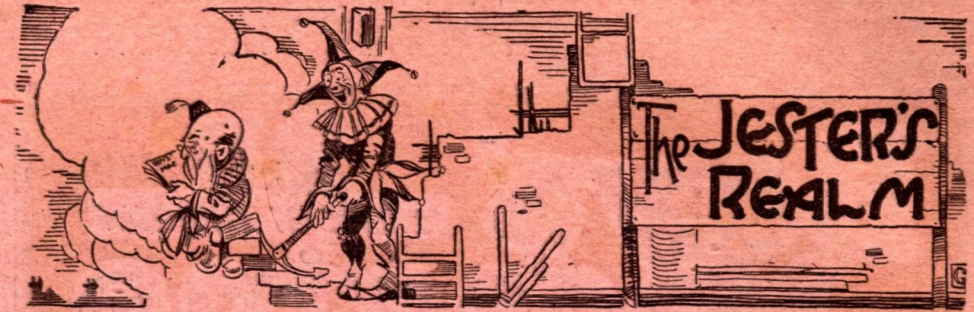
2¢
EVERY SATURDAY



THE ATLANTIC—OR BUST!

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EASY TO TELL.

The squad were having "visual training." One smart recruit was asked by the officer to count how many men composed a digging party in a distant field.

The party was so far away that the men appeared as mere dots, but unhesitatingly the recruit replied: "Sixteen men and a sergeant, sir."

"Right; but how do you know there is a sergeant there?"

"He's not doing any digging, sir."

(Fountain pen to J. PROTHEROE, 27, Plasycaninib Road, Goodwick.)

MAKING ROOM.

A Jew went into a tailor's shop to buy an overcoat. When he tried one on he found it was too tight, so he said to the tailor: "Look here, Ikey, dis coat am a bit too tight for me."

"Don't pe foolish, mine friend; you go home and 'ave a bath, and it will fit you peautiful."

(Fountain pen to A. DEWIS, 3, Goodenough Road, Wimbledon.)

A CHANGE OF NAME.

Farmer Giles, who was driving a pig to market, had stopped at an inn to have rest and refreshment.

He had just started when a boy came to him.

"Say" said the boy, "is that your pork out in the road?"

"Pork—it's my pig."

"I know, but a car has just run over it."

(Fountain pen to A. H. PLANT, 28, Paultow Road, Beuminster Bristol.)

A LATIN SALAD.

A teacher once asked a Cockney lad to read the following Latin paragraph:

*I sabile hier es ago
Fortibus es in aro
Nobile Themis trux
Vaticinem pes an dux.*

This was what the Cockney read:

*I say, Billie, here's a go.
Forty buses in a row.
No, Billie, them is trucks.
What is in them? Peas
and ducks.*

(Fountain pen to L. HUGHES, Bryn Arvelon, Valley Road, Llanfair-jechan, N. Wales.)

PREPARATION.

A student failed in an examination in all the five subjects he took. He telegraphed to his brother: "Failed in all five. Prepare father."

The brother telegraphed back: "Father prepared. Prepare yourself."

(Fountain pen to A. HOLDEN, 143, Hancock Street, Blackburn.)

CAR CANNY!

FRIEND: If you saw the man who stole your car, why don't you get it back?

MAC: I'm waiting for him to put on a new set of tyres.

(Fountain pen to E. ENO, Stockport Road, Longsight, Manchester.)

HER ANATOMY.

MAGISTRATE: And where did she strike you?

PLAINTIFF: On my own doorstep, and I hit her back in the same place.

(Fountain pen to J. COLEMAN, Greenrath, Tipperary, Ireland.)

A TOUGH SMOKE.

POLICEMAN (to late reveller): You can't get in that way. You're trying to open the door with a cigar!

"Shigar—shigar? Then I must have shimoked me latch-key!"

(Fountain pen to T. FINLEY, 26, Post Office Street, Warrenpoint, Co. Down.)

SPOKE TOO SOON.

CUSTOMER: Pick me out all the bad eggs you have!

SHOPKEEPER: You're the finest customer I have had for years.

CUSTOMER: Now give me a shilling's worth of good ones.

(Fountain pen to A. FAKES, Mill Road, Hemsby, Near Great Yarmouth.)



Yank: Does that mule ever kick you?
Nig: No, suh, but he sometimes kicks where I'se jus' been.

Cricket bat to: J. Pope, 188, Latimer-road, Eastbourne, Sussex.

FOOTBALLS and FOUNTAIN PENS awarded to senders of all jokes printed on this page. Send in your favourite joke to: Joke Editor, "Boys' Magazine," 146, Fetterlane, London, E.C.4. Coupon on Page 17 must accompany every joke submitted.

Just a Sheer Sensational Dive Through the Boundless Blue of Space. What Escapes! When Our Two Aerial "Aces" Skid in Their *Silver Hawk* from the Lights o' London to the Skyscrapers of New York!



Hallo, U.S.A. ! London's Coming in a Cyclone Burst of Speed, to Capture Your Imagination with her Two Most Famous Flying Fellows.

**DARE DESMOND AND
JIM BLAZER, THE BOY
"BIRDMEN."**

"LICK her up to full revs., old son." Jim Blazer, balancing himself on the rope-tautened wing of the silver monoplane, cocked his sandy head nearer to the sleek, shining engine whose four-hundred "horses" were fretting to get busy.

His pal, Dare Desmond, bronzed, lean and wiry, settled down behind the windscreen of the pilot's cockpit and smoothly slid forward the throttle lever.

B-r-r-r-r! The engine roared into life, the twenty cylinders sucking in their full measure of juice, the rocking tappets racing into a bluish blur.

Jim Blazer listened intently, his eyes half-closed, a smile curving his wide mouth—listened with the instinct of a born mechanic to the even *tat-tat* of the rocker arms that told of perfectly adjusted clearances, to the rhythmic purr of the valves.

"She's dandy," chuckled Jim. "Giving every ounce of her power and as smooth as velvet." His blue eyes lit up eagerly. "Reckon we're going to get away with it, Dare."

In that quiet Kent field, grey and sombre in the half-light of the awakening dawn, the plucky lads were making final preparations for a flight that could bring them fame and fortune—or death that might not be even mercifully swift.

They were going to try and fly the Atlantic—to tell the world that the monoplane Dare Desmond's

father had sacrificed health and fortune in perfecting was capable of capturing the non-stop flying record for Great Britain.

It had been a long-dreamt-of adventure. When, two months before, his father had died, broken by his struggle to obtain recognition as an aeronautical genius, Dare Desmond had set his heart on proving that the *Silver Hawk*—the aeroplane that had been all of the worldly goods his father had had to leave him—was a world-beater.

And so, as a memorial to the big, kindly man who had not lived to claim the fruits of his genius, Dare, with the loyal, wholehearted assistance of Jim Blazer, his school chum, had worked and schemed to pull off a spectacular record-breaking flight from London to San Francisco.

"Hop aboard," grunted Dare. "The wind's freshening and I reckon there's breeze enough to help lift us over those tarnation telegraph wires."

A little anxiously the boy airman looked round the dim-lit field as Jim Blazer climbed lithely into the navigator's cockpit. It was by no means an ideal place from which to lift the machine that would climb slowly with that terrific load of petrol in the tanks cunningly built into the hollow wings and tapering fuselage.

But there were important reasons why the lads had selected that desolate field with its solitary

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

ramshackle barn standing near to the hedgerow. There the lads had been able to assemble the machine in secret, and secrecy had been vitally necessary. Dare and Jim had grim reason for knowing that a powerful syndicate was ready to stop at nothing to gain possession of the Silver Hawk.

That shady syndicate was controlled by a rogue, Silas Blackstock, who had cajoled, threatened and offered big money lures to Dare Desmond's father in an endeavour to secure the secret plans of the wonder monoplane.

Somehow, Dare had a hunch that his enemies knew something concerning the transatlantic flight, despite his efforts to safeguard his plans.

Last night, when he and Jim had been guarding the monoplane, Dare could have sworn that he had seen a shadowy move beyond the dust-covered window—that he had caught a fleeting glimpse of a dark, evil face peering through the casement.

"Hullo—what's that?"

Jim's voice rose suddenly above the rumble of the engine. He was leaning over the padded side of the cockpit, gazing with narrowed eyes at a dark speck rapidly growing in size in the eastern sky.

"It's an aeroplane and travelling at a deuce of a bat," said Dare, thrusting back his goggles and following the direction of his chum's intent gaze.

"Looks as if she's heading this way, Jim."

By now the drone of the strange aircraft was plainly audible, and there came the glint of a silver nose as the hurtling machine swung into a dizzy dive towards the narrow field.

"Ugh!" Dare's hand closed over the throttle lever. "I don't like the look of this, Jim. We'll push off while the going's good. I'm not waiting to discover if that Nosey Parker is dropping in to wish us luck—"

"I've a hunch," broke in Jim's voice dryly, "that it's brickbats and not bouquets that we'll be getting."

There was certainly something hostile about the snarling crimson biplane. Swiftly it had lost height, and now it came zooming over the hedge at the far end of the field, spitting exhaust fumes from the crackling engine like some infuriated dragon.

"What the blazes is that crazy fool up to?" Dare yelled.

Anxiously he watched the hurtling machine land down-wind at a dizzy speed. The undercarriage wheels spun as they touched the turf; but the engine was still roaring as, with its tail lifted like a red scorpion, the biplane came screaming across the field.

"He's trying to shock us," Jim cried in sudden alarm. "Look out, Dare!"

As the crimson biplane came for them full-tilt, Dare took a grim risk.

With a sweep of his thumb he opened the throttle wide and the Silver Hawk leapt forward with a roar of its magnificent engine.

But with that terrific weight of petrol in the tanks the larger machine was like an elephant endeavouring to dodge a mosquito, until it got into the air.

In an instant the oncoming biplane had switched its attack, yawing with swinging rudders towards the retreating monoplane which Dare was grimly striving to lift off the ground.

Closer and closer they raced to what seemed inevitable disaster—the crimson attacker hugging the turf, its spear-like nose directed towards the long, silver fuselage of the monoplane that needed a desperately long burst of speed before it would lift.

Dare's lips compressed in a thin line. Every moment he expected to hear the splintering of the undercarriage spars. It was a fearful risk he was

taking in trying to yank the fully loaded machine off the ground with so short a run. It was touch and go whether the whipping spars and wires screaming in protest would stand that desperate strain.

The hairs at the back of Dare's neck stiffened as he caught a horrifying glimpse of the crimson biplane hurtling only twenty yards away—saw the leering, mocking face of the seeming madman crouching behind the windscreen lit with triumph.

"Yank her off, Dare!" Jim's hoarse voice cried in his ear. "Or that blighter will break her back—"

His voice subsided into a gurgle as suddenly the nose of the Silver Hawk shot upwards and Jim was flung on to the floor of the cockpit.

The joystick rammed back against his stomach, Dare zoomed the roaring monoplane, and the crimson attacker hurtled beneath her, missing the rising undercarriage by mere inches.

For an alarming moment the monoplane seemed to poise in the air, its great propeller blades thrashing wildly. And then sheer brute engine-power lifted it into a climbing turn.

"Gosh!" Jim gasped, scrambling to his feet and leaning at a perilous angle over the side of the cockpit. "What's that crazy ruffian at? If he'd hit us he'd have broken his own neck—"

"Reckon he was well paid to take that chance," broke in Dare's voice grimly. He swung over the rudder bar and the monoplane dived back towards the field, where the crimson machine that had almost brought disaster had pulled up near to the hedge.

"I'm going to have a closer look at that blighter and I won't forget his ugly dial in a hurry. When we've hopped over the 'herring pond,' Jim, and come back to little old London for the bouquets, we'll pay that skunk for this."

He leant over the cockpit, staring intently at the ape-like man below, who had clambered from his machine, his swarthy upturned face a livid mask of baffled rage.

"As I suspected," Dare muttered grimly, "that's the shady cove who was skulking round the barn window last night. Reckon he's been paid by Silas Blackstock's syndicate to crash us."

His thoughts swung off at a tangent as something glinted in the hand of the ruffian below, and a bullet whined angrily past the young airman's head.

"Look out!" yelled Jim. "He's trying to let daylight through our tanks!"

Again the menacing bark of the gun rose above the throb of the engine, but quick as thought Dare Desmond spun the monoplane into a spiral climb. The bullet screamed harmlessly through the undercarriage struts and Dare Desmond laughed with relief, for the Silver Hawk was climbing rapidly now.

With a chuckle Jim Blazer hollowed his hands and roared out a derisive farewell to the fuming blackguard below.

"So long," he boomed. "Sorry we can't stop, but we've an important appointment with the President of the United States of America."

The Secret of the Iceberg.

JINGO! I reckon we're going to win through, Dare. In a couple of hours we ought to strike the jolly old coast of Newfoundland."

Jim Blazer's eyes were shining as he leant over the oil-splashed panel dividing the twin cockpits and shouted gleefully in his chum's ear.

Dare Desmond, desperately weary, but with jaw muscles hard and prominent, lifted his tired eyes from the dancing needles of the instrument board.

"We've enough juice in the tanks for another thousand miles," he chuckled. "If we can hang on,

Jim, we'll have every non-stop flying record beaten to a frazzle."

The two lads were elated, and they had every reason to be so. The Silver Hawk was behaving magnificently, like the mechanical thoroughbred that it was.

The deep-throated roar of the engine had not faltered since the rugged, mist-veiled coasts of Ireland had many hours before slid out of sight behind the silver tail-plane.

It seemed that the plucky youngsters' challenge to the might of the Atlantic was destined to succeed. But there had been grimly anxious moments. Once the yawing monoplane had been driven down by a fierce blizzard to within twenty feet of that grey-green waste of heaving waters, her planes and elevators burdened with a heavy mantle of snow.

With the landing-wheels almost skimming the breakers, Dare had taken a desperate chance in side-slipping the great machine until he had shaken that dangerous load of snow from the wings and climbed to safer altitudes.

It was the grim memory of those perilous moments when the lads had been very near to death that

wind buffeted the slender framework of the monoplane that seemed a fragile thing to carry two lives over that wilderness of angry waters.

Dare flattened out, and the speed gauge flickered to the hundred-and-eighty miles an hour mark, as the monoplane scudded fifty feet above the waters, the storm clouds closing down on the gallant machine and its stout-hearted crew like a giant shroud split with the silver threads of forked lightning.

Boom! Crash!

The thunder roared like massed artillery, and Dare's heart missed a beat and then went racing on again as the Silver Hawk shivered as though struck by some giant hand.

Jim Blazer, leaning over the cockpit, the wind tearing at his face, peered grimly through the gathering darkness.

It was like some grim inferno, with the roar of the thunder, the crash of the breakers so perilously near



LASSOED IN ESQUIMO-LAND.—The boy airman felt the rope tighten around his shoulders. He was heaved violently through the water, up the gleaming side of the iceberg.

brought a gleam of anxiety to Jim Blazer's eyes as he glanced now at the black clouds heavy with snow scudding across the grey sky.

A storm was gathering ahead of them, a great black mass of threatening cloud too monstrous to skirt with the petrol tanks running low.

"You'd best dive under that packet of trouble," Jim warned the youngster crouching in the cockpit. With a wave of his hand he indicated the cloud banks from which the dull growl of thunder already drifted.

Dare nodded. "Hold tight!" he yelled. "I'm going to drop."

He glanced at the magnetic compass, with its tiny reflecting mirror, that helped to betray deviation from the compass course, through the drift of side winds.

Then he throttled back, and yanked forward the stick.

With screaming wires the monoplane nose-dived towards the Atlantic rollers, from which the rising hurricane was whipping white crests of foam. The

foam-flecked wheels, filling the air with a deafening din.

Suddenly Jim stiffened and let out a warning yell. "Look out!" he screamed into the teeth of the wind. "There's an iceberg ahead—a whopper—"

Up spun the silver nose, answering to the controls like a steeplechaser sailing over Beecher's Brook. A great mass of ice gleamed beneath the dangerously canted plane. Then Dare drew a breath of relief through his clenched teeth as the giant iceberg disappeared in the darkness below.

"Corks! I thought we were for it," he muttered. "We'd have concertina-ed properly—"

He broke off suddenly and jerked his head round. With dramatic unexpectedness an amazing thing had happened.

Whoosh!

A flaming rocket came screaming upwards, coming, so it seemed, from the heart of the great iceberg.

With a hoarse cry, Dare threw all his weight on the rudder bar. The monoplane screeched into a

vertical bank, and only just in time. The red ball of fire from the mysterious rocket whizzed within a foot of the starboard wing.

"Thunder!" yelled Jim who was white beneath his flying helmet. "If that's some friendly gink trying to signal that we're on the right course for U.S.A. I wish he'd be a bit more careful with his giddy fireworks!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a second rocket shrieked through the darkness, and Dare was a fraction of a second too late in that desperate side-slip which almost saved the Silver Hawk from disaster.

The ball of fire ripped its way through the aileron of the port-side wing, and in an instant the inflammable fabric was ablaze.

A groan broke from Dare Desmond's lips. For a moment he watched that crimson flame, fanned by the raging wind, envelope the wing with horrible swiftness. His eyes had dulled, and all the life had gone from his face, for in his heart he knew that this was the bitter end of all his hopes and dreams.

"You'll have to put her down."

It was Jim's broken voice that pierced the numbness that gripped his brain. Automatically he kicked the rudder bar and wrenched over the stick, sending



A GALLANT KIND OF GUNMAN.—Cords held his upper arms, but his hands were free. Dare snatched the gun. His chum was on the threshold of eternity. Crack, crack!

the Silver Hawk into a dizzy side-slip that swept the flames outwards and away from the petrol tanks.

He straightened the doomed monoplane as the rollers rushed up to meet them.

They hit the waters in a cloud of spray. There came the grim crash of splintering spars, the shrill hiss of dying flames, for now the port-wing was awash.

The gallant engine spluttered, petered out with a rasping cough. With a shudder the crippled monoplane settled deeper in the green trough of the rollers.

Mechanically Dare Desmond loosened his rubber safety-belt and straightened unsteadily. For a tragic moment the eyes of the two lads met.

"Was there ever such cruel luck?" Jim burst out, a sob in his voice, stout lad though he was.

Dare lifted his head, his eyes glaring in his white face.

"I'll swear that rocket was no friendly signal," he muttered hoarsely. "Some cur has winged us..."

He got no further. Suddenly a queer sound, like

the clanging of a metal door, jerked his gaze towards a giant iceberg drifting some twenty yards away.

Grimly the boys stared at that glittering mammoth bearing down upon them, stared with amazed, incredulous eyes. For, as though some mysterious door had opened in the side of that iron-hard, gleaming mass, a group of men stood on a narrow ridge before a shadowed opening in the iceberg.

Villains At Work.

DARE brushed the salt spray from his eyes and stared again. His tired brain was struggling against a sense of unreality, as though this was all part of some grim nightmare from which he would soon awaken.

"Jim," he cried, clutching his chum's arm, "can you see someone moving on that berg, or—or am I going off my rocker?"

Even as he spoke, a huge man standing on that gallery of ice let out a booming hail.

"Aho! there! Stand by for a line. We're going to save you."

There was an ugly ring in that stentorian voice, for all the apparent friendliness of its message, a voice that somehow vibrated a reminiscent chord in Dare's brain.

He leant over the padded rim of the water-logged cockpit, an amazing suspicion dawning in his mind. For some moments he stared intently at the squat, powerful ruffian standing on the iceberg, a rope draped over his gorilla-like arms.

"Silas Blackstock!" he gasped, as suddenly recognition came.

"I don't like the look of this, by Jingo. Now we know who handed us this packet of trouble."

A good deal that had bewildered Dare now became startlingly clear. It had been Silas Blackstock, who had sworn a grim oath to wrest the secrets of the mystery aeroplane from the boy airman, who had raked the Silver Hawk with flaming rockets until the machine had spun to disaster. That much was plain to Dare Desmond. But it was amazing, almost incredible that Blackstock should have succeeded in switching his relentless vendetta to the heart of the Atlantic.

There was no time to probe this startling mystery. More urgent thoughts clamoured in Dare Desmond's brain.

"Jim," he said huskily, "we're for it, old son. But we'll go down with flying colours. Silas Blackstock is on that berg and you can bet your sweet life that it's not for love of us that he's coming to our rescue. It's the Silver Hawk that he's after, but we'll keep his thieving hands off her."

A lump rose in his throat as quickly he turned and commenced to search feverishly amongst the medley of tools in the locker beneath the pilot's seat. He was looking for some weapon with which to pierce the empty petrol tanks that were keeping the aeroplane afloat. The lad hated this thing that he must do to send the gallant aircraft plunging to its doom—the machine that had carried him and Jim Blazer to the three hold of fortune—before disaster had come. It was like stabbing an old friend in the back.

At last he straightened, an axe gleaming in his hand. Even as he swung over the side of the cockpit the weapon lifted to pierce the bulkhead tank beneath the waterline, a fierce yell split the air.

Silas Blackstock had guessed the lad's intention.

The ruffian straightened the rope coiled in his great hands. It was remarkable judgment that sent that length of hemp curling through the air, so accurately that it's noose dropped neatly over its human target. A hiss sounded above Dare Desmond's head, even as Jim let out a warning yell.

And then the boy airman felt the rope tighten

around his shoulders as Blackstock wrenched it taut with his powerful hands until it twanged like a bow string. Dare slashed at the rope with the hatchet as he felt it being drawn in, but at that moment he was jerked off his balance. The axe slid from his grasp as he was heaved violently into the water, fighting for breath as he went under.

At length he was dragged to the surface, a great gleaming wall towering above him. He saw that it was the side of the iceberg, that in some astonishing way had been manoeuvred close to the wrecked aeroplane, so near that two of Blackstock's gang had sprung down to the cockpit and pounced on the helpless Jim.

The rope tautened beneath Dare's armpits and he was yanked out of the water. Now he was slithering up that glittering wall to the ridge above, a wall that the bewildered lad suddenly realised had nothing of the freeze or cold clamminess of ice. Despite the peril of this desperate situation, sheer curiosity prompted him to jab his finger nails into the queer substance of that shining wall. It was hard and slippery beneath his touch, and suddenly he gasped.

"Crumbs!" he muttered. "It's not ice at all. It's a kind of plate glass toughened with wire fibre. What sort of bluff is Blackstock putting over?"

The next moment he was dragged over the ridge, where Silas Blackstock, a sinister, herculean figure, stood hauling in the rope.

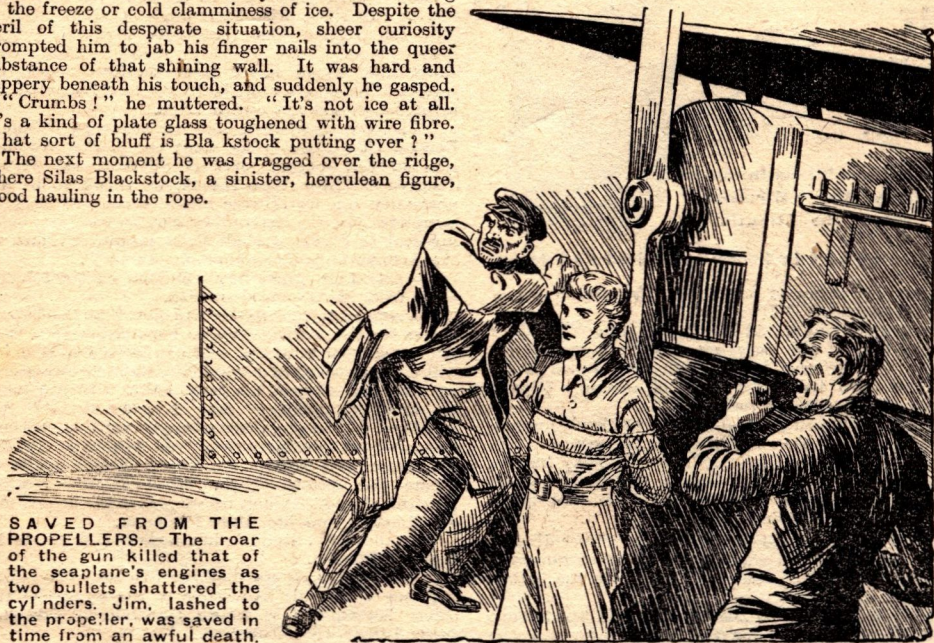
sneering, gloating face. He was no fool. He knew that violence would be worse than useless with Blackstock's burly bodyguard gathered in that mysterious doorway leading from the rugged ridge.

"Well, you all-fired scoundrel," Dare laughed tauntingly, "what am I up against? Reckon you can't hand out a worse shock than the fright your ugly face gave me. Gee! some honest farmer lost a mighty good scarecrow when you took up thieving."

The crook gasped like an irate codfish. Dare's taunt had hit him on the raw, for he was vastly conceited, as is the way of notorious criminals.

"I'll show you something," he roared. "You'll have a mighty big respect for me before I've finished with you."

Out shot a gorilla-like arm and the slack rope was whipped with painful jerks around his arms and shoulders.



SAVED FROM THE PROPELLERS.—The roar of the gun killed that of the seaplane's engines as two bullets shattered the cylinders. Jim, lashed to the propeller, was saved in time from an awful death.

He was jerked to his feet and then he was staring into the sinister, utterly evil face of the most dreaded crook in Europe's underworld.

Silas Blackstock looked him over. The brat had the square jaw of his father, he decided, and eyes as recklessly brave. But he would break his spirit.

"You're beaten, Dare Desmond," he sneered. "I've got you this time and your precious machine. You won't see Frisco now, my young Atlantic flyer."

Dare looked at him steadily.

"Don't crow too soon," he retorted coolly. "You've won the first round, but the fight's not over yet. You may have a bit to come from me before this affair is finished."

Blackstock's fleshy face flamed with sudden rage. He lifted his great fist and struck the boy a cowardly blow on the mouth.

"I'll teach you to threaten me," he snarled. "Thunder! You don't know yet what you're up against."

The boy's fists clenched, his eyes blazing. But he checked the impulse to smash his knuckles into that

The boy threw a swift, uneasy glance over his shoulder as he was dragged towards the doorway by the infuriated crook. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the Silver Hawk being hauled with ropes towards the amazing floating lair in which he had been trapped. And Dare groaned as he saw Jim Blazer standing helplessly in the rear cockpit with a burly ruffian lashing his wrists.

Things happened swiftly after that. He was sent stumbling into a steel-walled corridor beyond the doorway, and then a vicious jolt in the ribs directed him down a circular stairway.

Dare's brain was working overtime. It was obvious to the lad that his imagination had not tricked him. He had seen enough now to realise that Blackstock with characteristic ingenuity had camouflaged a seagoing craft with glass-like armour that from a distance had every appearance of being the rugged surface of a great iceberg. The camouflage was crude at close quarters, but no one in their senses came near to an apparent iceberg, and Dare had a shrewd suspicion that the astonishing floating lair was equipped with motor-driven propellers that

starter and beads of perspiration broke out on the boy's forehead. It was horrible the thought of what awaited Jim, and suddenly he gave a heart-stricken cry.

Sensing trouble, his two burly guards closed in on him. And it was then that Dare was conscious of something pressing against his right hand, a hard object bulking in the coat pocket of the ruffian at his side.

A gun?

A desperate hope flashed into his brain. Thank heaven his hands were free, although cords lightly held his upper arms.

He did not hesitate. Swift as thought, he snatched the weapon from his gaoler's pocket, so deftly that the ruffian was completely taken off his guard.

Dare's nerves were strained to snapping point as he flashed the steel barrel upwards. Blackstock's fingers had depressed the starting switch, and the propeller quivered. Jim Blazer was on the threshold of eternity.

Crack! Crack!

The roar of the gun mingled with the deep-throated roar of the seaplane engine, a roar that died as swiftly as it was born as two bullets tore through the water jackets and shattered the cylinders.

A yell of rage broke from Blackstock's lips. But even as he swung round, rapping out fierce orders, Dare fired again.

In a flash he had switched the attack to the mercury vapour lamps in the roof. There came the crash of glass as the whining bullets found their fragile target. In a trice the steel-walled hold was plunged into impenetrable darkness.

With the strength born of desperation, Dare wrenched himself free from his gaolers, chuckling softly as he ducked, and the confused crooks blundered into one another in the darkness, cursing vilely.

All was confusion now, but Dare's brain was as cool as ice.

He had fixed the position of the black seaplane clearly in his mind before that flying lead had doused the lights. He was racing towards it now, bent

almost double as he zigzagged past the rasping feet of the bewildered crooks combing the baffling darkness for their elusive quarry. Speed, he knew, was his only chance.

He had wriggled free of his bonds, for that had not been difficult. He had only been lightly trussed, and now with his arms free he had whipped a jack-knife from his pocket, opening it with his teeth.

"That's better," he muttered; "a knife and a gun level the odds a trifle."

He straightened swiftly as he saw Jim's trussed body looming through the darkness.

Snick. Snick.

The bonds were cut like lightning, and Jim came tumbling from the propeller.

"Quick! Behind the seaplanes. They'll give us cover."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the inevitable happened.

"Got you, you whelp!" roared a triumphant voice, and a great hand whipped down on Dare's shoulder. The boy spun round, crashing the butt of the revolver against his assailant's stubby chin. All the boy's strength was behind that blow. The crook straightened surprisingly and then, reeling, he tottered backwards.

The next moment the hard-pressed lads dived behind the deep fuselage of the towering seaplane.

"Reckon it's hopeless, old scout," came Jim Blazer's anxious voice as they crouched in the darkness. "They're bound to get us."

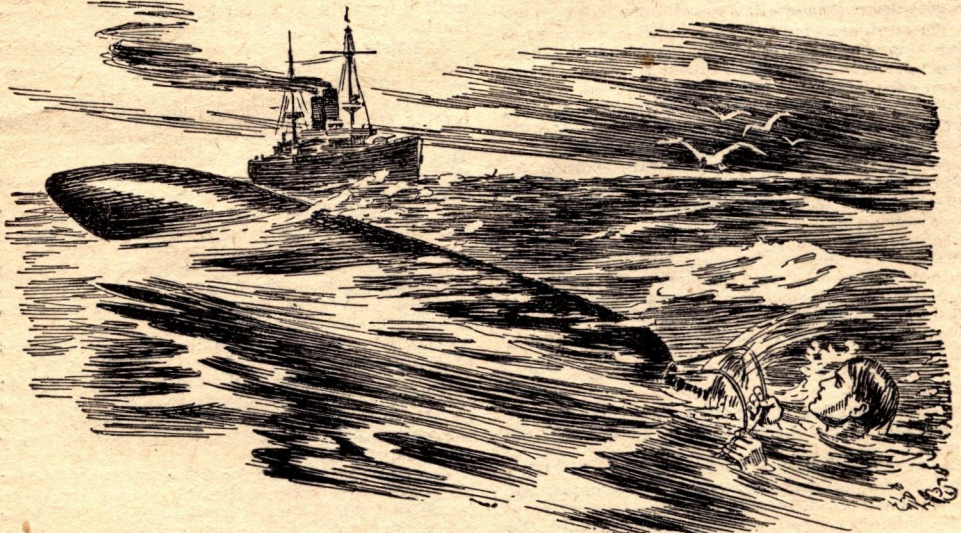
Dare grunted.

"We've given them something to get on with," he gritted. "If only we can get through that door we stand a chance. I know the way out of this floating refrigerator, and I spotted a boat slung on wheeled davits in the passage leading to the landing ledge. We might—"

Blackstock's roar broke in.

"Thunder!" he yelled. "Hunt them out. Are you windy of a couple of kids?"

Someone had produced a powerful torchlight, and its broad beam suddenly stabbed the darkness, creeping relentlessly round in search of the fugitives.



ATTACHED TO A TEARING TORPEDO.—Dare took a deep breath as the torpedo shot through the gunboat's tube, and dived into the waters. He clung to the metal guards, the foam seething round him as he tore through the sea.

Suddenly a triumphant yell rose as they were spotted. A wave of menacing, shouting humanity swept down on them. Dare straightened, the light of battle flaring in his eyes.

And then the great idea came.

Like lightning he gripped the side of the seaplane fuselage and yanked himself over the edge of the cockpit.

B-r-r-r-r-r-r!

The powerful engine roared into life as Dare jabbed his hand down on to the self-starter. The seaplane shivered and the boy flung himself clear as the next moment it went surging forward.

The turmoil was terrific. With yells of fear the scoops scattered before that yawing seaplane whose hissing propeller-blades thrashed the air like flails. Those blades, which could bring death or dreadful injury, cleared a path as effectively as cavalry sabres. "Quick!" Dare caught Jim's arm and dragged him forward. "Run for the door!"

They bolted like hares through the darkness, for the electric torch had been flung to the floor in the riot. Their luck was in, for Blackstock and his ruffians had been driven to the further extremities of the steel-walled hold. And for a vital moment the way to the door was clear.

There came the thunderous crash of the runaway seaplane smashing to destruction against the metal wall. And then the hard-pressed lads were out in the corridor, making for the spiral staircase.

A yell announced that their enemies had taken up the chase.

Bang! Bang!

Pistols barked and bullets hummed perilously close. Blackstock's yells to his ruffians to plug the fugitives added to the din behind them.

Dare groaned and switched his course as a line of burly figures came tumbling down the spiral staircase. That way of escape was hopeless now.

They sped along a steel-walled corridor, running blindly with no clear idea of how flight could help them. But they couldn't swallow the thought of an inglorious surrender. And there was always the hundred-to-one chance that something might turn up.

The corridor ended in a door which swung open as Dare blundered against it in his headlong flight. The next moment they stumbled into a darkened place, the nature of which there was no time to investigate. Dare whipped round and, slamming the door, shot the heavy bolts into place. At least they had found sanctuary and time to think.

As they slumped against the wall, panting for breath, the scraping of feet drifted from the corridor outside. Then Blackstock's taunting voice came to their ears:

"Say, it's obliging of you cubs to save me the trouble of clapping you in irons. Walked into a nice little prison, haven't yer? Reckon you'll sing small in a day or two when hunger gets a grip of your vitals. A taste of starvation will bring you to your senses, and, take it from me, that's all you're likely to taste..."

"Go away, you tinpot crook," yelled Dare. "You make me tired."

At length the flow of abuse from beyond the bolted door ceased, and footsteps died away into the distance.

"Old pal," said Dare feebly, searching for Jim's hand in the darkness, "we're up to our necks, but we ain't beaten yet."

Their hands gripped, and then, utterly weary, the lads slumped to the floor, their heads nodding. Silence came as they dropped into the sleep of deep exhaustion.

HOW long Jim and Dare slept they never knew. They awakened at last, refreshed in body and mind, puzzled at first by their unfamiliar surroundings, the crash of heavy seas that faintly came to their ears.

Soon enough a flood of grim memories dispersed the mists of sleep from Dare's brain. He stumbled to his feet, his face a little white as grimly he looked round that tomb-like prison.

It was long and bare with queer, slit-shaped windows in the steel walls that admitted a sparse amount of daylight, and revealed the sea beyond.

"Looks as if we're cornered," sighed Dare, running his hand through his fair, tousled hair. "Got any bright ideas, Jim?"

Jim pressed his hand to his waistline and rolled his blue eyes.

"I'd think a good deal better if I had something under my waistcoat," he burbled.

It was a pleasant surprise when Dare, with a chuckle, produced a packet of chicken sandwiches that were part of the rations he had carried on the Silver Hawk. They were decidedly over-salted, for they had not escaped the dampening effects of Dare's ducking. But they went down well, for the lads were too ravenous to be particular.

"Best keep a little in reserve," said Dare, reluctantly putting the brake on his appetite. "We shan't grow fat on what Blackstock is going to hand us."

They explored their prison then, searching for some possibility of outwitting Blackstock.

"Our hopes of a get-away don't look particularly bright," said Dare a little despondently. "Might as well be in Pentonville as in this camouflaged tanker. Blackstock's a tough proposition when it comes to a game of wits, and he's tarnation clever. Only a criminal genius would have thought of tricking the law with a floating forger's den..."

Jim's excited voice interrupted.

"Come here, Dare, and switch your peepers on to this."

Jim had been nosing restlessly around the hold, and now he had found a wire-bound handle protruding from the wall near to a darkened corner—a handle which he turned as Dare came forward.

And then a circular disc of steel swung noiselessly back on well-oiled hinges, revealing a cylinder-shaped orifice beyond.

"Corks!" Dare exclaimed, bending nearer and peering at the sleek, shining thing of metal poised in the cylinder. "Here's a torpedo in its firing tube. This explains those queer observation slits cut in the wall. Reckon Blackstock's taking no chances and has armed this ark like a dreadnought."

"Confound!" said Jim glumly. "I thought I had hit on something that might have helped us..."

He stopped abruptly, puzzled by the changed expression on Dare Desmond's freckled face as he stood peering intently through the observation window above the torpedo tube.

"By gosh—look!" Dare dragged his chum level with the opening.

And then Jim, too, saw the ship which had brought that cry of excitement to Dare's lips. It was a naval gunboat ploughing its way through the grey waters, some half-mile distant from the cunningly camouflaged tanker.

The lads were silent for some moments—bitter disappointing moments when they were forced to realise that this chance of freedom was beyond their reach. For it seemed impossible to signal the craft, whose resources could swiftly have ended Blackstock's reign of terror.

"Helpless as sardines in a tin," muttered Jim

disgustedly. "Bet that skunk, Blackstock, is grinning."

Dare said nothing. He was thinking hard, sifting every possibility of making use of this chance of turning the tables on Blackstock—the chance that each moment was slipping beyond their reach. Shouting was utterly useless, and those slit-like windows were too narrow to enable them to strip off their coats and wave them outside their prison as distress signals.

His anxious eyes wandered down to the torpedo tube, and suddenly he laughed. A desperate plan had flashed to his mind—a plan which entailed an appalling risk. But success could mean the recovery of his beloved monoplane. That meant far more to the lad than paltry revenge.

"Jim!" His eyes were shining as he jerked his pal near to the opening in the metal wall. "You're the bees' ker-nees on machinery. See if you can get that torpedo working."

Blazer looked at him quickly.

"What's bitten you, old son?"

Swiftly, for every moment was precious, Dare shot off his scheme.

"There's only one way out of this glory-hole, Jim—through that tube. I'm going to take a chance and slide out with that torpedo. Maybe it will carry me near enough to the gunboat to be spotted, for it's too far to swim."

Jim gasped. It seemed madness; but might as well try to shift the Rock of Gibraltar as endeavour to persuade Dare to abandon anything on which he had set his fearless mind.

Jim thrust his head into the tube, his lithe hands moving over the intricate mechanism—the delicate controls of the powerful air engine and the gyroscopic rudders. And the boy who loved machinery forgot the peril surrounding him during those moments that he probed the secrets of the eighteen-foot torpedo.

Suddenly there came a powerful whirr and the twin propellers whirled behind their guards of metal network.

"Good lad."

Dare's voice betrayed a little of the excitement he was trying to suppress. The next moment he had kicked off his boots and ripped off his jacket.

Jim had found the switch now that operated the water-tight door at the foot of the tube. He did not open that door yet, for he saw that it synchronised with the automatic release gear that would leave

the heavy torpedo free to hurtle down that sloping, well-greased cylinder.

"Good luck, old son."

A grip of hands and Jim stood aside as Dare wriggled into the tunnel. He got a tight grip of the propeller guards, whose wide mesh provided useful holds for his hands.

Jim, a little white, slithered a hand past Dare's prone form, and the air engines whirled into full power as he opened them out.

And then there came a waft of salt spray, and Dare took a deep breath as the torpedo shot forward. The air-tight door had slid back and, like a giant fish, the whining thing of metal plunged into the sunlight and dived into the waters.

That dizzy plunge was the first grim taste of the ordeal that waited him. He went under, hanging on with the strength of desperation, although it seemed that his arms must be jerked from their sockets. The angry foam from the whirling propellers lashed against his face. His temples throbbled like the beating of trip hammers, his lungs were craving for breath, that cruel pressure on his chest like the grip of an iron hand.

Would the torpedo never rise to the surface? Subconsciously that thought was thudding in his brain. Jim had adjusted the elevators as best he could, but supposing he had failed?

He knew that human endurance could stand this dreadful strain no longer. He must let go, shoot to the surface and fill his bursting lungs with air. For another dreadful moment he hung on, sheer will-power triumphing over physical torture.

Then, after what seemed an eternity, the shining nose of the torpedo cleaved the surface and Dare Desmond was gulping great draughts of clean air into his aching lungs. The torpedo was bounding through the waves now, with the grey gunboat only two hundred yards away. Dare fought against that numbing paralysis creeping over him, for his boyish strength was drained to the uttermost. The metal guards to which he clung tore into his flesh and the foam seething arounds his hands was flecked with crimson.

And then the drone of the powerful air engines faltered and died. The torpedo shivered and then stopped, floating lifelessly on the surface, its power spent.

But Dare had been seen. Already a boat was being lowered down the towering grey hull, to

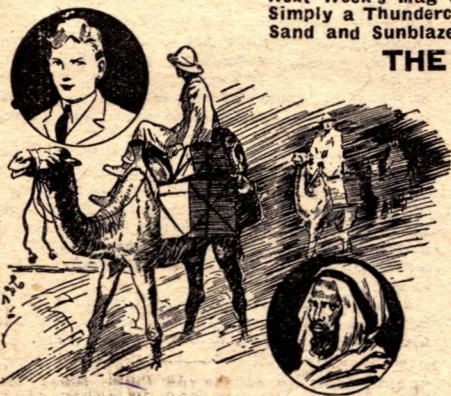
Next Week's Mag Contains a Long Foreign Travel Tale That is Simply a Thunderclap of Thrills, With a Weird Mystery 'Midst the Sand and Sunblaze of the Desert. Introducing Three New Chums.

THE BOY EXPLORERS IN

A CLASH WITH THE SACRED EAGLES.

Ignatius Smith, through his thick-lensed spectacles, looked on the dreary waste of sand that was the Sahara of the Sudan from an academic point of view, though he was only a youngster. He went in search of papyrus and ancient tombs. A highbrow—a boy Egyptologist. But Jack Sanders, his college chum, and William Scrubbs, the cockney kid, were after Adventure. Well . . . It came, Weird and Eerie, Wild and Thrilling. Just Read this Yarn of the Boy Explorers in the Desert Next Saturday. Don't miss

BOYS' MAGAZINE.





investigate the amazing thing that the astonished captain had seen through his binoculars.

Five minutes later, strong arms yanked Dare Desmond into the boat that had come bounding over the waves to his rescue. He swiftly told his amazing story and with such conviction that the friendly captain, who was by no means averse to a scrap, quickly decided that here was a job for the British Navy.

Soon the gunboat was racing towards the camouflaged tanker, its vicious nose splaying an arc of foam.

Dare Desmond was highly elated, but a little anxious for the safety of his pal.

"Reckon those curs will try and take it out of Jim for this," he muttered uneasily as he stood near to the deck-rail, eager to be amongst the first to board the floating lair.

Suddenly a groan escaped his lips.

Dramatically a thunderous explosion drifted across the waters from the disguised tanker. A vivid sheet of flame shot skywards from the glittering heights of the mystery craft, which a few moments later shrouded in a great pall of smoke—black, oily fumes that told of flaring petrol.

"They've fired the tanks," muttered Dare, his anxiety deepening. "Scuttling the ship and deserting like rats now the game is up."

He saw a line of black seaplanes scudding away from the flaming craft. He guessed the grim truth. Blackstock and his gang were not waiting for the retribution which the gunboat's menacing, uncovered guns threatened.

What had happened to Jim? That thought throbbled in Dare's mind to the exclusion of all others as the gunboat raced over the Atlantic rollers, and at last reached its quarry.

His heart heavy with dread, Dare was the first to leap on to the slipway before the swinging doors of the seaplane nest.

He raced into the room of steel walls, smoke searing his eyes and nostrils, the roar of the flames in his ears. It seemed impossible that Jim could escape, for the lower hold must be a raging furnace now. His heart thudding against his ribs, he dived towards the door which led to the place where he had last seen Jim Blazer. Would he be in time to save his pal?

Then suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks, a hoarse cry of mingled relief and anger breaking from his lips.

Through the swirling smoke he saw Silas Blackstock standing in the rear cockpit of the Silver Hawk, heard his sinister voice snarling at Jim Blazer, who crouched in the pilot's seat.

"Start that engine, you cub, or I'll fill you with lead!"

The crook was pressing the barrel of a revolver against Jim's throat, his eyes red-rimmed with smoke and gleaming with insanity and fear.

In a flash Dare read the grim story which that scene told. Blackstock had meant to escape in the Silver Hawk, whose crumpled wing his men had repaired during the night. So fast and reliable a machine would have given him a greater chance

than one of his slower and more cumbersome seaplanes. But he had not reckoned with the intricate engine with its many gadgets. He could not start it, and Jim Blazer had been brought to the rescue at the pistol's point.

Dare's muscles tensed, a gleam of triumph in his eyes. Then he sprang, a bunched tornado of nerve and muscle.

Crash! The monoplane rocked with the violence of that smashing descent on the outwitted crook. The young airman got a stranglehold on Blackstock's bull-like throat, yelling to Jim to snatch his gun. With a roar Blackstock heaved his great shoulders, sending Dare sliding from the cockpit. But he hung on like a terrier, his swinging weight jerking the crook's head over the padded rim, until Blackstock, almost throttled, grew purple as he fought for breath.

That last grim struggle was short-lived. The armed bluejackets closed in and soon the cowed, shivering Blackstock was firmly held. Retribution had overtaken the super-crook at last.

Jim Blazer leapt from the cockpit, a huge grin on his smoke-grimed face.

"Stout feller," he chuckled, gripping Dare's hand. "Another few seconds and I'd have been cold mutton."

There was a good deal that they wanted to say to each other but they cut it short. The flames were leaping through the doorway now and the heat of the glowing walls was unbearable.

"We'll save the Silver Hawk with her own power," said Dare. "Hop in, Jim."

And so it was that the young adventurers again felt their beloved monoplane tremble like a high-strung racehorse as the four-hundred horse-power engine roared into life.

Dare opened her out and skilful work with rudder and elevator sent the monoplane hurtling through the high doorway, the sea spray flecking the wheels as they climbed above the waters.

Dare glanced at the flickering dials, listened to the even hum of the engine, the twanging of the wires.

"She's in fine flying trim," he threw across his shoulder to the cheery Jim. "And her tanks are full, old son. What say to circling Newfoundland and setting a compass course back to good old London. Are you game?"

"Sure," came Jim's cool reply. "It'll be a rest cure after that little bother."

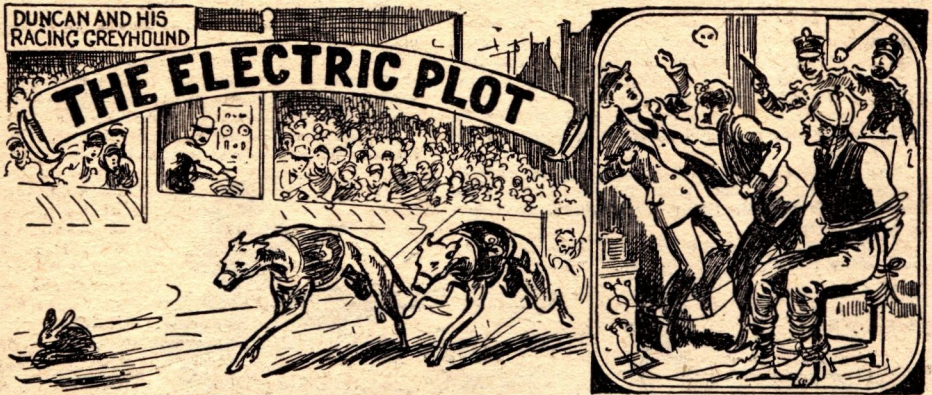
When, thirty hours later, an oil-spattered monoplane slid down the searchlight beams and landed smoothly on Roydon Aerodrome, Dare and Jim had an amazing reception. The delirious crowds broke the police cordons and rushed towards the Silver Hawk, whose progress across the Atlantic had been wireless by the ships who had sighted the gallant boy airmen.

Shoulder high, the weary youngsters were carried across the aerodrome, and as Dare Desmond looked around at that seething mob, he smiled. They were vastly excited over the conquering of the Atlantic by a British machine, but he was thinking how much more they would be thrilled if they knew what grim adventure he and Jim Blazer had found out there in the grey wa-tes.

But that story lived to be told when, a few weeks later, the revelations at the trial of Silas Blackstock, the prince of forgers, astounded the world.

Say, Chaps, you want to read the Next Mag. Out on Saturday. A Detective Tale of Falcon Swift, Fencer; A Yarn of Dick Turpin; A Desert Yarn; A School Tale—What Doings!

'Ware Hare! See the Greyhounds Streaking Along the Ground Like Lightning, Chums. Hurrah! The British Dog Defeats the Yankee Champion!



The Greyhound Stealers.

THE *Drummond Castle*, which had brought Duncan Grey and Squire Branscombe—together with their greyhounds—across the Atlantic, had hardly docked at New York before a tall and wiry man, with a sunburned complexion, came across the gangway towards them.

"Mr. Grey?" he asked, approaching the Squire who, shaking his head, motioned to the lad beside him.

"Ah!" remarked the stranger, and there was something like contempt in his glance as he switched it to young Dunk, the owner of England's fastest greyhound, Pretty Polly. My name is Ferando Massy. I have come from Mr. Cyrus B. Luxted. He hoped to meet you here himself and escort you across to his home in St. Louis. Unfortunately, Madame Luxted was suddenly taken ill, and so he sent me to meet you. I have big car waiting."

Squire Branscombe felt instinctive distrust.

"You say you come from Mr. Luxted, the owner of the champion American greyhound, Bootlegger?" he said interrogatively, "but you have no means of identifying yourself with that gentleman? No letter of introduction, for instance?"

"Ah, yes—I forget," answered Ferando Massy, and from his speech Duncan guessed him to be of Mexican origin. "I bring this letter for you," and from his pocket he withdrew a crumpled envelope and handed it to Duncan.

It bore the boy owner's name upon it and within was a typewritten letter that seemed to confirm what the fellow had just told them. A signature—*Cyrus B. Luxted*—appeared at the foot of the note.

"Very well, Mr. Massey," he said. "We shall be glad for you to escort us to St. Louis but we need not trouble you so far as your car is concerned. I have my own on board this liner, and as it is specially designed to transport dogs—having loose boxes at the back—we will travel in that."

A gleam of disappointment showed in the dark face of Ferando Massy as he heard the Squire's decision, but the next instant he had himself under complete control.

"Ver' well, sir," he muttered oilyly

Half-an-hour later the Squire's splendid Bentley had been hung from the liner to the dock, and

Pretty Polly and Great Oak were led across the gangplank towards it.

Murmurs of admiration escaped the lips of the inevitable quayside crowd at the sight of the two magnificent greyhounds which presented such a marked difference: Pretty Polly a spotless white, and Great Oak a perfect shade of fawn.

The dogs safely ensconced in the specially built loose boxes at the back of the Squire's car, they set off—following the Cadillac driven by the man Massy.

A couple of hundred miles were covered, with only a short halt at a wayside road-house for a hurried meal. Then they were across the border into the state of Ohio.

The car ahead seemed to Duncan—who was driving the Bentley at Squire Branscombe's suggestion—to be going slower, and the fellow Massy was glancing from left to right of the narrow road which ran between two rows of great hills—almost mountains.

Then, from high up away on the right, Dunk perceived a puff of smoke appear amongst a bunch of bushes, and the next instant he felt, rather than heard, something whizz within half an inch of his ear.

The Squire had heard it, too.

"Someone shooting, Duncan!" he snapped out, and shot an angry glance whence the shot had come.

Another puff of smoke appeared, and this time a bullet crashed through the wind-screen, splintering it to fragments, to finally bury itself in the dusty road.

Then suddenly from both sides of the road from the hills above them came a veritable volley of shots.

How Duncan or the Squire escaped being wounded they were never able afterwards to explain. The Bentley certainly did not escape injury, for a moment later the engine stalled and the car came to a standstill.

The Cadillac ahead also pulled up—and Ferando came running back—something gleaming in his right hand.

As he drew nearer Duncan perceived it to be a long-barrelled Mexican six-shooter, and realised that they were up against it.

Shouting a warning to the Squire, Dunk leapt from the driving-seat, snatching up something from beside him as he did so.

It was a long thonged dog-whip which he had for his hounds, though never used. He gripped it tensely as he turned to face Ferando Massy.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" commenced Squire Branscombe indignantly. Massy showed his yellow teeth in an ugly leer.

"You no get to St. Louis," he snapped, "unless you 'and over those two dogs!" and he jerked the dirty thumb in the direction of the box at the back of the car, as he raised the pistol in his other hand. Simultaneously Dunk deftly sent the whiplash curling round the muzzle of the vicious-looking weapon, and then, with a jerk, he yanked it completely out of the scoundrel's grasp.

The pistol spun through the air on the end of the whip, and Dunk managed to catch it before it fell to the road.

Swiftly he spun it round so that Massy was covered.

An amused chuckle from Squire Branscombe mingled with the baffled snarl of rage which came from Ferando Massy.

"That rather alters the shape of things, eh, my fine fellow?" remarked Duncan. "Now perhaps



HORS DE COMBAT!—Dunk's whip snaked through the air and the greaser's gun went spinning.

you'll explain yourself. I suppose you're another of Jim March's accomplices," and from the manner in which the dago winced, Dunk knew that he had hit the right nail on the head.

Already from the hills Duncan could see figures creeping down. Before long, he realised, they would be helplessly surrounded.

"Quick, sir," he shouted to the Squire. "Get the dogs out. Our only chance is to get away in that Cadillac. No, you don't!" The last to Massy as he made a move towards the American car, and Dunk thrust the muzzle of his pistol into his face.

Squire Branscombe nodded, and hastening to the doors of the dog-box at the rear of the Bentley, hastily threw them open, and drew out the two precious greyhounds.

Holding each by the collar, he hurried them across to the big Cadillac roadster.

Meanwhile Duncan moved backwards step by step towards the car, still keeping Massy well covered by his own pistol.

The engine of the Cadillac was still running. Dunk noted with satisfaction. He was beside the door

admitting to the driver's seat when he fired a couple of shots—one over Massy's head and the second into the dust at his feet.

The terrified dago let up a yelp, turned and ran for his life.

Dunk, laughing, sprang into the car, grasped the steering-wheel and, 'midst a cloud of dust, they were off.

Crack! Crack! Crack! sounded a volley of pistol-shots behind them, but the bullets mercifully went wide as Dunk kept the great car to the centre of the road and rammed his foot down on the accelerator.

In the driving-mirror at his elbow Dunk saw another car pull up alongside Ferando Massy, who

began excitedly explaining something with much waving of arms to a villainous individual whom Dunk recognised as his arch-enemy—Jim March!

White with fury March raised his clenched fist and drove it full into the dago's face, knocking him senseless to the road. The next instant he was speeding after the Cadillac.

Quickly Dunk imparted the news to the Squire, as he coaxed still more speed out of the eight-cylinder engine.

The great roadster went leaping through the air and Dunk swung it round a bend in the road upon two wheels.

A cry escaped his lips. Two hundred yards ahead of him was a railway level-

crossing—and a man was closing the gates to let a train through!

Already the fellow had closed the further gate, and was now leisurely crossing the metals to push to the gate nearest to Duncan.

It was too late to apply his brakes and it was impossible to charge through the solid gate already closed.

Dunk groaned as he realised it. Then a desperate chance occurred to him. With a savage wrench of the wheel, he slung the car round into a skid on to the track—missing that gate by inches.

The next instant Dunk was steering the car along astride one of the lines, and bracing himself to keep his seat as the car bumped and swayed over the raised sleepers.

He was forced to slacken speed, and as he did so, he shot a quick glance over his shoulder back at the crossing.

The railway man had slammed to the second gate and March and his crew were the other side of it!

So far they were safe, but even as Duncan breathed

a sigh of relief it was caught up short upon his lips, as the mouth of a tunnel loomed into sight! Converging into its gaping maw the double track of metals narrowed to a single line!

A hasty glance left and right showed no chance of escape. They were now in a deep cutting with the ground rising up sheer on either side—they could not escape. And somewhere behind them an express train was thundering.

In the far distance Dunk could see a pin-prick of light—the other end of the tunnel—but it seemed miles off yet.

Still he courageously kept on, gripping the wheel like a vice.

The spot of light was growing bigger every second when the thunder of the locomotive as it also entered the tunnel came to their ears.

Dunk kept his eyes glued upon that ever-widening disc of light ahead of him as he gripped the wheel and kept his foot down upon the gas.

Would they never reach the other end? It seemed interminable. Then, suddenly, they shot out into broad daylight again, and Dunk strained his eyes quickly right to left to seek some means of escape from the thundering juggernaut upon his heels.

He gave a cry of triumph as he perceived the track ran out on to a flat plain, with only barbed wire strung between flimsy wooden posts to divide the track from the waste of ground.

"Hold tight!" he yelled to the Squire as he tugged the wheel round.

The front wheels of the Cadillac bumped over the metals and the rear slewed round.

With a crash they struck one of the posts supporting the wire, carrying it away before them as it were but a match-stick and then the next instant they were safe upon the plain.

And not a moment too soon, for the next instant the huge locomotive swept past them at seventy miles an hour.

Duncan sank back in his seat with a gasp and allowed the car to come to a standstill.

WHEN at length Duncan and Squire Branscombe arrived safely at St. Louis, and they told the story of their journey to Mr. Luxted, that sporting gentleman could hardly believe his ears.

"I know that scoundrel, Massy," he said. "I used to employ him—had to fire him for thieving. I'll see to him after the match. Everything's fixed up for the race between Bootlegger and Pretty Polly to take place at New Orleans. You'll stay at my place to-night and then we'll go down the Mississippi in my racing motor-boat. We'll be safe aboard her, at any rate." But there Mr. Luxted was wrong.

The following morning Duncan and the Squire were escorted down to the banks of the Mississippi.

There Mr. Luxted's fine boat, which he had had specially fitted up with box-kennels to accommodate the dogs.

Soon all were aboard and, casting off, they commenced their long trip down one of the world's greatest rivers.

Mr. Luxted was a perfect host, and spent his time pointing out the points of beauty on the way down.

"Soon," he said, "we shall pass under one of the finest bridges you could ever see. It spans this huge river and is completely made of steel on the suspension system. There! Now you can just see it in the distance."

Duncan and Squire Branscombe shaded their eyes and gazed out over the brilliant surface of the sun-lit waters.

Spanning the great stretch from one bank to the

other, they could see the famous bridge, but Duncan's quick eyes spotted something hanging down from one of the girders.

"What's that?" he asked his host, at the same time pointing to the black blob suspended against the sky.

Mr. Luxted shook his head.

"Must be one of the ropes used by the painters," he said. "They suspend a truss of hay below where they're painting as a warning to boats passing below."

They were almost passing beneath it, when the bundle started to sway violently and something alive scrambled out from amidst the hay.

At first it looked like a huge man, but the next instant as the figure leaped through the air towards the motor-boat, Dunk gave a cry as he realised that it was an immense gorilla!

The next instant the brute had landed with a thud upon the top of the low cabin.

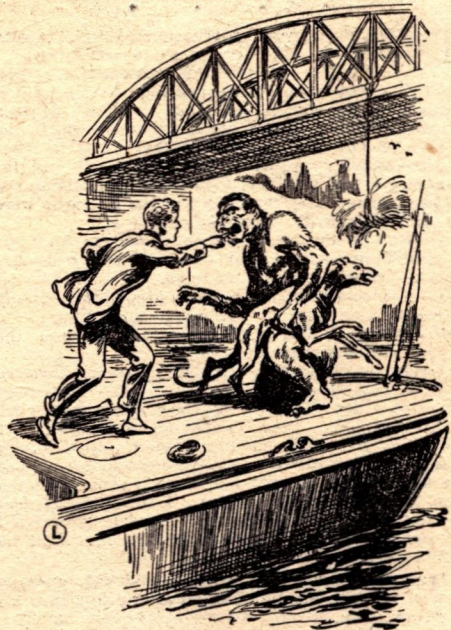
It paused for a moment to steady itself, and then, rising to its full height upon its hind legs, it came ambling clumsily towards the spot where stood Mr. Luxted, and Dunk and the Squire.

From the bridge above came a hideous laugh and, glancing up, Duncan perceived the evil features of Jim March!

Then this was yet another move on that scoundrel's part to prevent the great match between Pretty Polly and Bootlegger from taking place!

A cry of alarm broke from Mr. Luxted's lips, and he gazed about for some weapon with which to arm himself. But Duncan had already snatched up the only available thing.

It was a marlin-spike, and he now gripped it like a dagger as he stood his ground facing the great



NOT APPETISING FOR THE APE.—Using the marlin-spike as a dagger Dunk thrust it clean between the slobbering jaws of the giant ape.

beast, its jaws agape and a white foam frothing from them.

The gorilla, however, seemed to take but scant notice of the human beings. It had its flat nostrils raised in the air, distended as it sniffed about.

Then suddenly its bleared eyes fell upon the kennels in which the greyhounds were housed, and great roars came from its massive throat.

Springing through the air, the gorilla descended upon the kennel in which was Pretty Polly.

In a moment the beast had wrenched open the door and, seizing the terrified greyhound by one of its slender legs, dragged it out.

The next instant Pretty Polly would have supplied a meal for the gorilla, but Dunk sprang courageously forward and thrust the marlin-spike full into the open jaws of the roaring beast.

The sharp point pierced the jowl of the gorilla.

With a howl of rage, the great brute toppled backwards, lost its footing, and slipped overboard.

There sounded a splash, a great churning of the waters, and the powerful motor-boat sped on.

A veritable hail of bullets sped through the air and struck the boat on all sides.

"Down!" yelled Duncan, leaping from the top of the cabin into the cockpit and crouching below the bulwarks of the boat, "Keep down."

The others were quick to obey.

At length they were out of distance—and the firing ceased.

With a light laugh, Duncan scrambled to his feet again, followed by the other two.

"It'll be a miracle if we ever run that match, Mr. Luxted," he said.

"We'll run it," retorted Mr. Luxted determinedly, "and afterwards we'll run this murderous gang into the pen."

* * * *

THE day of the great International Match between Pretty Polly and Bootlegger dawned at last.

No further sign of Jim March's activities had been manifested, and hopes ran high that they had thrown up the sponge, and that the last had been heard of them—but here again a mistake was made.

Duncan Grey had paraded Pretty Polly in front of the stands together with Mr. Luxted and his Bootlegger, and they had then placed the champions of two continents in the charge of the men who were to place them in the starting-box.

Duncan made for the spot where he had left Squire Branscombe. But of the Sporting Squire, Duncan could now find no trace.

He was looking anxiously about him when suddenly a South American black man sidled up to him.

"Who yu lookin' for, Boss?" murmured the negro in an undertone.

"Why for Squire Branscombe," answered Duncan.

"Have you seen him anywhere? The gentleman who was with me before I left the stands just now?"

"I sure have, Boss," answered the negro. "I seed him goin' off wid a gentleman called Mister March and anudder one. Yep, dey had got hold of his arms and were walking of him along between dem to a little hut ober dere. I heard one of dem say dat when der man in der control tower started up der hare, it would be de end of him—dat he would be electrocuted!"

Duncan waited to hear no more—already a vague idea of the hideous plot afoot was crashing into his bursting brain.

Uttering a wild cry, the youngster thrust his way through the crowd gathered on the stand, and made for the track.

Already the dogs were in the starting-box, and the Starter was about to give his signal to switch on the

electric power when Duncan reached the foot of the control tower.

"Stop! Don't start the hare!" he yelled; then, taking the rungs two at a time, Duncan raced up the ladder and into the cabin where the control man stood with his hand already resting upon the lever ready to pull it over and switch on the current.

Duncan dashed in and knocked his hand from it.

"Thank goodness I'm in time!" he cried. "My friend, Squire Branscombe, has been forcibly dragged off to a small hut—that one over there.

The face of the control man went a sickly shade of green.

"That's the dynamo cabin!" he broke out.

"Then don't touch anything until we've seen what's happening," cried Duncan. "Come on."

He turned towards the ladder and, standing aside for the official to descend before him, followed him quickly down to the track.

"What's all this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Luxted, who had followed Duncan to the tower.

"That's what I'm going to find out," cried Duncan. "Bring the police."

Duncan set off at a run towards a small wooden hut situated about a hundred yards from the track.

Reaching the door, he took a run at it, setting his shoulder against the flimsy woodwork.

It gave inwards with a crash, and the spectacle presented to him nearly froze the blood in his veins.

Seated in a ten-e-pot-tare upon a chair was Squire Branscombe, bound hand and foot. Clapped over his head was a dome-shaped cup of metal from which ran some wires to the powerful electric dynamo in one corner of the hut, whilst from his bare feet ran a second pair of wires.

Standing over him, grinning like a fiend incarnate, was the figure of Jim March, who swung round at the sound of the door being burst inwards.

"Ah! Duncan Grey!" he cried as he sprang forward and gripped Dunk by the wrist. "You, too, shall share Branscombe's fate. I've threatened to get even with him ever since he fired me off his kennels, and with you out of the way, too..."

"Hands up!"

The order came peremptorily from the open doorway, and a couple of South American police officers stood framed in the opening, each with an automatic gripped in his hand.

"You're too late!" hissed March with a maniacal laugh. "Once the control man touches the lever and starts that dynamo he'll be burned to a cinder."

Then swiftly March dropped one hand and made a grab at his hip-pocket. The police could not fire for fear of hitting Duncan, who stood in their path, but there was no need.

Drawing back his clenched fist, Duncan drove a perfect pile-driver right to the point of March's chin, and the scoundrel crumpled up in a heap to the ground.

Then, dropping upon his knees, Duncan swiftly tore away the wires, and the ropes from Squire Branscombe and dragged him to his feet.

"You're all right, sir?" he cried anxiously.

"Yes," nodded the Squire. "Thanks to you, my boy."

* * * *

THE start was delayed in the great International Match, but at length the hare was set forth upon its journey, and Pretty Polly and Bootlegger released from the starting-box.

The wonderful race is still talked about in New Orleans—despite the fact that the English dog won—but few realise how terrible a tragedy was nearly enacted when the control man pulled over the lever to switch on the power.

Your Editor's Sparkling News!



Surprise Number Next Week, Chums. Falcon Swift, the Monocled Manhunter, in a Detective Duel Full of Gasps.

THE CASE OF FERNANZ, THE STRANGE FENCER.

School Tales, Desert Yarns—A Packed Programme.

MY DEAR CHUMS,

Sometimes my mind sparkles, sometimes I must confess I am a sadly dull dog. Now, chaps, I was thinking of my own experiences in Egypt when the writer of our detective tales of Falcon Swift was ushered into my office.

Only a little while ago he had completed for the Mag. a tale of Egypt featuring Falcon Swift, the Sporting Detective. I was impressed with that yarn. It was called "The Mystery of the Dream Curse." You remember it, eh? A ripping tale!

Well, the old fellow sat there in the armchair, puffing at his pipe. He's been everywhere, and he's a valuable fellow to our Secret Service. He's erudite, speaking all the dialects of East and West, and he's peered into every strange corner of this remarkable world on which we live. Yet with his beard and his rough tweeds, our Secret Service author looks one of the most homely men on earth. A deception, as I very well know. What a scintillating brain the man conceals beneath the exterior which he shows to all the world! How he does love to pose as a heavy, dull-witted old Britisher who has just happened to blunder into Hong Kong—or into San Francisco, say, or into some flowered, mysterious city of Japan. But you can bet he's really there for a purpose.

Anyhow, he came in to deliver the yarn of Falcon Swift and his nippy boy assistant, Chick, which is appearing next week. It is entitled

The Case of Fernanz, the Strange Fencer.

I read this tale through, while our friend sat patiently awaiting my verdict. Soon I was gripped by the personality of Fernanz, the fury of a Spaniard who carried a walking stick—in reality a sword-stick, a remarkable piece of steel which he could bend almost double and let fly from his hands with the accuracy of an archer giving wing to his arrow, with tremendous, deadly intent.

The white glare of the searchlight was shed on the strangest side of the Underworld I have ever encountered. A so-called Detective Agency run by master criminals. Crooks protecting Cabinet ministers, millionaires . . . And these big men of the world knew that they were shadowed by crooks, and knew that they would pay terrible toll unless they paid—blackmail!

Fernanz the Fencer figured in every thrill. He was the master criminal.

Engrossed I was in the duel between Fernanz and Falcon Swift, the English detective, with his boy

shadower, Chick, playing a part in flashing, thrilling episodes. But, as I say, I am a dull dog at times. Still, at the back of my mind, I was thinking of the last time I was in Egypt, in the saddle of a fast-swinging camel which was running into the desert under the yellow lantern of the moon. I was with Arab guides, and they had promised to show me a sight in that moonlit desert such as no white man had ever seen before. Well, eventually I saw it . . . ough! I can tell you the sand was like a swift-running yellow carpet under the feet of my camel as I spod back to civilisation.

I looked up from the detective story at length.

"A breath-taking yarn," was my verdict. "But listen. Couldn't you write a tale about yourself, say, when you were young, with two friends, exploring the world. I saw a sight once that I can't explain. It's a mystery to me." And I told him about what I had seen in the desert.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Fancy you telling me about that. White skeletons hanging

YOUR EDITOR'S ADDRESS.

When you're blue with nothing to do, Remember there's always a pal who wants to hear from you. Drop a line to:

THE EDITOR, Boys' Magazine,
Allied Newspapers Ltd.,
200, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

from stone columns in the sunblaze of the Sahara! Why, you visited the lair of the Sacred Eagles. Write you a yarn! Sure I can."

And so in next week's number of the good old Mag., chums, you are to get the yarn of The Boy Explorers in

A Clash with the Sacred Eagles.

And you will meet Ignatius Tyrrel Smith, the highbrow kid Egyptologist who blinks at the world through thick-lensed spectacles, and yet is possessed of an amazing amount of pluck, together with Jack Sinders, his college chum, and the queerest cockney who ever left Pimlico for the Pyramids—one Bill Scrubbs. A truly fascinating thrill yarn.

Chaps, not much space left to me to tell you about all the good things appearing in an epoch-making number. Don't miss

The Jape of the Season,

Featuring Scorchy Smith, the most volcanic fellow who ever descended upon the quiet of an English Public School. Scorchy Smith has got a jape up his sleeve this time, and I'll promise you a tale of laughs and excitement right now.

And then—well, Stan, the star steeplejack, has got just one good full-of-punch exploit with which to round off a most satisfying number of the Mag., not forgetting, of course, the serials, jokes, etc. And, chaps, I've got a surprise for you.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

JOKE COUPON.

Stick on postcard and send with your favourite joke to address on Joke Page.

Boys' Magazine.

27/8/27.

HOW they Fought Against the Monstrous Pirate Giant, so Paradoxically Called Handsome! Those Two Boys, Brian Carew and Neville Hawke, Spend a Glamorous Hour 'Midst the Crash of Cannon, 'Midst Villainous Patched Pirates, and the Sound of Swift Running Waters—In Search of Treasure.

"The Knights Ha' Come!"

BARBAROSSA was dying. A ball embedded in the great, red-bearded buccaneer's lung was slowly, albeit surely, draining his life's blood away. The sand 'neath his shaggy head was already tinted an ominous crimson.

Out on the calm waters of the lagoon rode the pirate ships; five of them all told.

In the centre was the towering galleon of Barbarossa, her commander's flag—a flaming ball of fire upon a jet-black ground—stirring in a fitful breeze; a powerful-looking barque; a large galley; a neat sloop and a snow.

All save the sloop gave signs of some recent fray. The barque was no longer in possession of her main mast, while the galleon lay almost upon its side. As for the snow, her career finished even as the dying man gave a more racking cough than any preceding. Her bows raised themselves in the air; hung for a moment as if in a last salute, then fell, and slid under the water.

But those upon the island foreshore had no eyes for anything but their red-bearded leader.

Barbarossa's lips moved. A huge ruffian with a villainous countenance bent down to catch the words. Almost immediately he sprang upright and faced the others.

"Steady, comrades!" he roared in a thunderous voice. "D'ye want to kill him afore ye've heard the secret? Back, or odds blood! Handsome will let daylight into your black vitals."

He lugged forth a long pistol and waved it round the circle of faces. A man grabbed at the weapon. It barked forth, and the fellow dropped, screaming with pain.

The others recoiled grumbling. The man Handsome rammed the weapon back in his belt and bent over Barbarossa. A pirate slid forward and dropped to his knees by his side. Handsome struck him a smashing blow with his great fist and then leaped to his feet. "D'ye doubt me?" he roared, and there was a demon in his eyes. "Ye dogs! Never a man could say as Handsome lay back on his comrades. Barbarossa here's spoken, and his words ye'll get, even same as I got 'em from him."

A murmur of impatience greeted his remark. Nevertheless, every eye was upon Handsome as he turned and made a sign.

From the centre of the ring of pirates two burly rascals stepped forward, hustling two lads in much torn garb before them. Short hours before Brian and Neville Hawke had fought alongside their comrades in valiant and successful effort to repel the wolves of Barbarossa who had boarded Sir Grant Carew's ship, the *Golden Imp*.

It had been a terrific battle, fought out in the midst of the pirate fleet. When, following some half-hour's bombardment, Barbarossa's men had crowded over the good ship's bulwarks, the defenders felt that all was lost.

Then, like ghosts out of a gathering mist, three mighty galleons loomed up and opened fire upon the

Chaps, you want to Read This Tale of the Old-Time Terrors of the High Seas, Lusting for Loot!



Walking the Plank—'neath the Skull and Crossbones—a Tale of Sunny Dancing Seas and Villainous Doings.

rovers. The effect was magical. In a twinkling the attackers were scrambling back aboard their own ships, swearing fearfully as they went. In less than ten minutes the pirate vessels were fleeing, pursued by the mysterious galleons.

But Barbarossa's wolves did not retreat empty-handed.

Brian Carew and his comrade in a moment were helpless prisoners, and being hustled away despite all efforts to rescue them.

Now three hundred pairs of eyes watched the lads curiously as they were dragged forward by a couple of stalwart guards.

Handsome spoke. "Which of ye buckos is Carew?" he demanded, harshly.

"I am," the shorter of the two replied.

The buccaneer nodded his great head slowly till his ear-rings rattled. Suddenly he swept his comrades with glittering eyes, while his forefinger indicated Brian Carew.

"Lads!" he cried. "Ye want Barbarossa's words, an' ye shall have 'em. But 'tis not through me ye'll get 'em. This here spark is agoin' to hear the secret o' Jeremy Wierd's treasure, otherwise Barbarossa swears he'll take it to Hades with him!"

The dying pirate stirred to another fit of coughing, and waved a feeble hand. Handsome seized Brian Carew and literally flung him to his knees by Barbarossa's side.

For what seemed an age to the watchers the boy remained thus, listening to the pirate's low voice; then Barbarossa's eyes rolled, and the great shaggy head lolled back, striking the sand.

The terror of the Main was no more.

No sooner did the ruffians realise that their captain was dead, and his secret, so far as they were concerned, unspoken, than they went mad with baffled fury and baffled greed.

A rush was made in the direction of the two lads, but Handsome with a terrible oath confronted the yelling mob. Such was his awful aspect that the leaders hesitated in their advance.

His voice thundered at them.

"Back—curse ye! Would ye kill the lad Rip me! How d'ye think ye'll ever find Jeremy's treasure if ye do?"

It seemed as though his words would have the desired effect. The onrush was stayed, and some even began to fall back.

Came the voice of a squinting-eyed, rat-faced cutthroat from the back.

"'Tis Handsome's way o' fooling ye. He wants to get the boy away an' wheedle the secret out o' him for hisself. Fools! Don't ye know Handsome yet?"

"Ye lie!" bellowed Handsome, lugging forth his long pistol. "Step out, Squinty, an' I'll shoot ye like the swine ye are!"

What would have been the outcome of the challenge was never known. As Handsome spoke there came the thunder of a cannon from beyond the lagoon. Every eye gazed seaward.

Rounding the headland of the isle came a huge galleon, two others following in her wake. A pall of white smoke hung from the side of the first vessel showing from whence had come the shot. Even as the buccaneers looked a second detonation shook the air.

A boat struck the shingle at the water's edge, and

THE Black Flag Unfurled! On the Velvet Black Waters of the Spanish Main Sailed a Stately Galleon—It Sped Swift and Sure in the Dancing Light of a Yellow Carpet Cast by the Lantern of the Moon. But it Sailed on a Sinister Quest of Evil.

a figure scrambled ashore to approach the pirates at a run. Over the intervening ground a voice shouted a warning:

"The Knights ha' come! The Knights ha' come!"

A Glorious Fight.

"THE Knights ha' come!"

The very few words seem to strike terror into the hearts of the ruffians. They stared in stupefied silence out upon the three enormous galleons, all thoughts of previous happenings forgotten.

Only the two lads revealed any signs of joy. Neville Hawke leaned down to whisper in his comrade's ear.

"'Tis our salvation, Brian. If any can save us from these demons, 'twill be yonder brave fellows. 'Twas their appearance saved the *Golden Imp*."

"Ay," muttered Brian Carew. "And yet they have much to do ere the fight ends, for, hark you, this isle is the buccaneers' stronghold."

He nodded his head toward the high, rocky cliffs at their backs. "Twill cost much blood to drive the rats from yonder crags and caves."

Just then a gun from the first galleon spoke again. There came a wailing sound overhead, and a ball crashed against the cliff-face. Hardly had the echo died away when another followed it. This time the aim was better. The ball cut a swathe through the ranks of the pirates, maiming and killing almost a dozen of them.

The shrieks and moans of the wounded acted like a spur to the remainder. They broke up, and with wild cries, made for the boats.

Handsome awoke to vigorous life. With a great, heavy sword in his hand he sprang in front of them, his thunderous voice bidding them stop.

"Ye can never gain the ships!" he bellowed at them. "Ye would be blown out of the water ere ye'd rowed half-way. Back to the cliffs!"

"Barbarossa's stronghold?"

"Ay, Barbarossa's stronghold!" bellowed Handsome. "D'ye see?" he added. "Yon dogs will come ashore to trap us, an' 'twill be up to us to give them a taste of their own medicine!"

Some hesitated. They watched a party of their comrades who had already put off in a boat. For about a hundred yards the craft shot along in answer to the lusty strokes of the rowers. Then the end came. A well-directed ball landed among the crew and went through the bottom of the boat. She sank instantly.

It turned the doubters. Next moment all were heading for the cliff, Handsome in the lead.

The Knights evidently realised their intentions, for the cannon balls began to fall thick and fast about them. Pirate after pirate fell, but the rest kept on, and at last they gained the foot of the cliff, and began climbing like monkeys.

The comrades' faces grew more serious as they progressed.

"'Tis a wondrous stronghold," Brian whispered to Neville Hawke. "Twill cost much blood ere it falls."

"If ever it does so," said his companion. "As to the bloodshed, it seems to me these rogues have nothing save swords and knives, with a pistol or two."

"Aha, my bucko," chuckled one of their guards,

who had evidently overheard the remark. "There ye be wrong. Behind those rocks is stored musket and ball and powder sufficient to last many months."

The truth of this was made apparent when Handsome led what remained of the buccaneers into the huge mouth of a cave. At the farthest corner was stacked a great pile of muskets, while close by stood four kegs of powder. The rovers quickly armed themselves, and then rolled large boulders into the entrance of the cave, evidently to form a barricade. This done, they took up station, their weapons pointing between and over those boulders so as to cover the flat ledge, which extended a few yards from the mouth. Handsome took a review of the preparations.

He growled his approval.

"Now come on, ye dogs!" he roared, shaking his fist toward the enemy ships. "Come an' see what Handsome can do for ye—Handsome is as Handsome does," he added with a burst of laughter at his own joke.

Nor were the Knights loth to obey. They redoubled their fire until the air was filled with the wail of cannon ball and the scream of grape and chainshot. Broadside after broadside was hurled against the face of the cliff.

What effect it was having elsewhere could not be ascertained, but certain it had none upon the cave. Handsome and his band greeted each volley with a roar of jeers.

Dusk began to creep on presently, and with its coming the firing died away gradually.

With the advent of night complete silence brooded over the isle. So far as those under Handsome were concerned this would have lasted till daybreak. But the others were not so particular.

Impatient at the waiting, somebody below started an old sea chanty. In less than no time the cliffs were echoing with the refrain:

To the Main for treasure

And Spain for sack,

'Neath the Jolly Roger

On a gold-strewn track,

And what do it matter if ye ne'er come back?

With a Yo Boys, Yo Boys, Yo!

One man in the cave attempted to take up the chorus. With a bear-like growl Handsome struck him down.

"I'll shoot the next one as opens his mouth!" he bellowed, drawing his pistol. "Rot 'em down there! How are we to listen for them dogs yonder?"

Suddenly the roaring ditty was pierced by a number of sharp reports. A burst of angry cries mingled with yells of pain.

Heard even above the curses of the buccaneers were the encouraging shouts of the Knights. Slowly but surely these shouts drew closer to the cave.

Handsome breathed deeply.

"Hundreds on 'em," he whispered hoarsely, and his face was awful to look at. "Hundreds. An' they're wipin' out them fools below. Sarve 'em right. But, lads, they ain't got old Handsome an' his buckos yet—ah! Take that, ye dog."

A head and shoulders had appeared above the ledge. Handsome's musket spoke and the figure disappeared. At that instant the moon issued from behind the clouds.

The situation was ideal for the pirates. As man after man appeared over the ledge the defenders could not miss, however they shot, while it was almost impossible for the Knights to hit them, hidden as they were in the shadow of the barricade.

Brian Carow and Neville Hawke crouched in a corner, almost blinded with smoke, watched the backs of the buccaneers in a fascinated sort of way, inwardly

praying for their undoing. They could make no move for an armed pirate stood close guard over them.

Handsome and his men were having no easy task. The supply of Knights seemed endless. At last some gained a footing on the ledge. With whirling swords and clubbed muskets they rushed the barricade, roaring their battle cry.

"St. John! St. John! Death to the buccaneers!"

The rovers sprang up to meet them, a few remaining below the boulders. 'Twas a glorious fight while it lasted. Handsome seemed to bear a charmed life. Never was he engaged by less than two foes, but none could touch him.

Of a sudden he roared forth an order. Instantly every pirate dropped flat.

The Knights uttered shouts of triumph. The next moment they were falling back before a fire that nothing could withstand as, in answer to their leader's command, those who had remained below the boulders rose with freshly charged muskets.

At the same moment a fresh outburst of firing came from below the cliffs. Handsome spoke for the first time.

'Tis the other buckos!" he cried. "They're takin' 'em from the rear! Go it! me hearties! Pepper 'em!"

They obeyed. Helpless to take the cave the Knights turned to meet the attack from below. Gradually the sounds of battle re-eded, until it died away into nought but fitful bursts of fire.

Presently came that roaring chorus:

'Neath the Jolly Roger,

On a gold-strewn track

And what do it matter if ye ne'er come back?

With a Yo Boys, Yo Boys, Yo!

"Boys," said Handsome, softly, "gather about. I want to talk to ye."

The Escape.

STILL gripping their weapons the pirates obeyed. There were about thirty of them, and as Handsome surveyed them he nodded his great head in satisfaction.

"Lads," said he softly, we're in devilish awkward winder'st now. "We can't board our vessels, an'—curse 'em!—the Knights'll beat us out o' this in the long run. Got that, comrades?"

The pirate looked at the speaker in angry dismay. One ruffian thrust himself forward, fixing Handsome with glittering eyes.

"Sink me, Handsome! that's poor clap," said he wrathfully. "Why, 'twas you brought us here."

"Ay," was the unmoved reply. "An' now I mean to get ye out."

"How? How?" demanded a dozen impatient voices.

"Easy as winkin'. Listen to me. There's a passage leadin' from the back o' this cave down through the cliff to the sea-shore. Barbarossa showed it to me years ago. My idea is to get out by this passage; sneak off in a couple o' the boats an' board the sloop. An' stiffen me! once she's under way she'll show as clean a pair o' heels to yon galleons as ever was."

A chorus of approval greeted the scheme. In the middle of it the chanty below roared out louder than ever.

"What about them?" demanded a pirate.

Handsome winked evilly.

"Remember the treasure, boys," he leered.

"When Master Carew lets us into the secret, why, we'll go a'search for it. An' we don't want three hundred rips a'shoutin' for a share in it—eh, me hearties?"

"Split me, Handsome!—that's a fact!"

"Ay! There's thirty here, an' it's enough!"

Handsome beamed upon them. "Sensible—sensible. An' now, since we're all agreed, let's make a start."

Brian and Neville watched their captors prepare themselves for the venture. The latter took the opportunity to put a question to his comrade regarding the dead pirate's last words. Ere Brian could reply, Handsome towered above them.

"Come on, me lads," said he, jovially. "If I mistake me not, 'tis a little adventure as will stir the cockles of your young hearts. Up an' after ol' Handsome." And the big pirate led the way into the inner blackness of the cave.

They had proceeded some distance in the pitch darkness when Handsome's voice boomed out for a light. Somebody scraped a tinder, and a moment later a flaring torch was raised on high by a buccaneer.

By its light the comrades realised that the party was treading its way through a passage so narrow that no two men could walk abreast. Beneath their feet the ground sloped downwards at such an angle

darkness. They reached the boats drawn up on the shingle, and ready hands seized upon a couple. It was but the work of a moment to launch and board them and with the minimum of sound necessitated by the dipping of the blades, the boats sped in the direction of the pirate vessels.

Presently both lay directly 'neath the stern of the sloop. Handsome sought for and found the anchor chain. Without a word he began to swarm up it, the others close upon his heels.

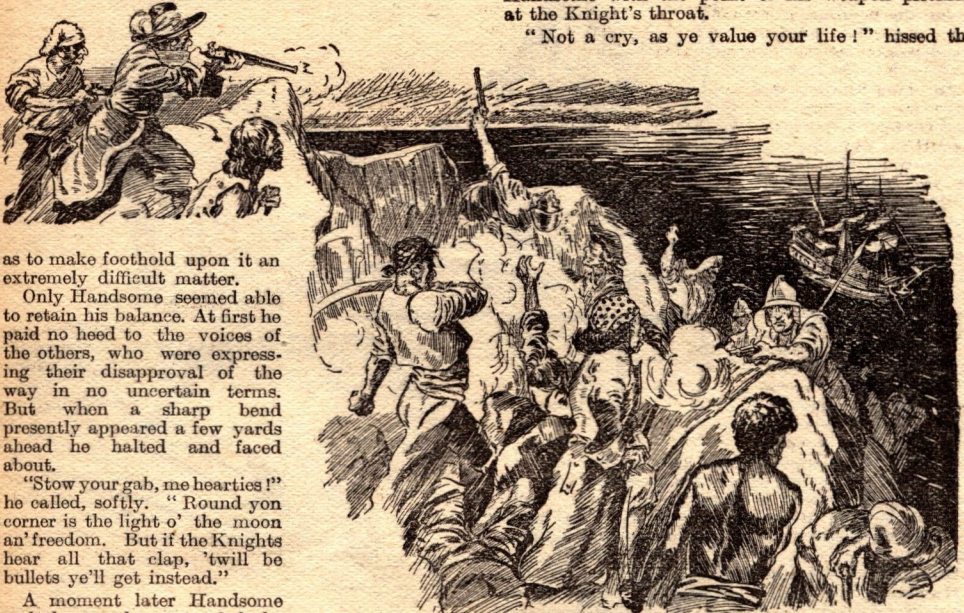
One of the last to ascend fouled the chain and dropped back into the longboat with a crash. Instantly a lusty voice demanded to know who was there.

Handsome gritted his teeth, and drew forth his great sword.

"'Tis a Knight," he growled.

Handsome tip-toed in the direction whence the sound had come. Suddenly he leaped. There came a muffled exclamation, and the buccaneers saw Handsome with the point of his weapon pricking at the Knight's throat.

"Not a cry, as ye value your life!" hissed the



A GLORIOUS FIGHT.—The pirates could not miss as man after man appeared over the ledge. Brian and Neville crouched back, blinded with smoke, inwardly praying for the pirates' undoing.

as to make foothold upon it an extremely difficult matter.

Only Handsome seemed able to retain his balance. At first he paid no heed to the voices of the others, who were expressing their disapproval of the way in no uncertain terms. But when a sharp bend presently appeared a few yards ahead he halted and faced about.

"Stow your gab, me hearties!" he called, softly. "Round yon corner is the light o' the moon an' freedom. But if the Knights hear all that clap, 'twill be bullets ye'll get instead."

A moment later Handsome and the two boys rounded the bend, and found themselves gazing out upon the moonlit foreshore.

A dark cloud was approaching the moon, hurried along by a rising wind. Handsome pointed to it with an exultant chuckle.

"Five min'ts, me buckos, an' 'twill be black as any Spaniard's heart. Then us for the boats afore ye can wink."

The cloud grew rapidly, as did the wind. There was no doubt that a storm was in the brewing. All eyes watched the cloud in fretful impatience.

At last its edge touched the moon's rim. In less than a minute the pale orb was obliterated, and the whole island shrouded in complete darkness.

"Ready, boys?" muttered Handsome. He gripped Brian and Neville by an arm. "Right! Off ye go!"

In silence they sped across the sands; a panting group of figures who loomed up like ghosts in the

former. "Just answer my questions, an' that mighty quick. How many o' ye dogs is below?"

"Fifteen," was the unwilling reply.

"Ay, and guzzlin' my liquor, like as not," snarled Handsome. "Here, Rialto Joe, stick your pistol in this bucko's ribs, an' if he moves let a hole in him. Follow me, the others."

Softly they descended the companion-way. From behind the closed door of the main cabin came the sounds of revelry. Handsome signed to the buccaneers to be ready. Then, seizing the handle, he flung wide the door.

Fifteen amazed faces stared at the levelled weapons, but not a man stirred. The leader of the rovers bowed low before the Knights, in mocking deference.

"Stab me! gentlemen, but 'tis a poor way to treat our guests," said he with a leer. "However,

seein' as ye are uninvited, perhaps we may be excused for any inhospitality. Gents., I'll ask ye to pass your weapons across the table."

The surprise was complete. The Knights obeyed, handing pistols and swords to Handsome, who piled them out in the passage.

Only one man attempted to disobey. As Handsome reached to take his pistol, he suddenly reversed it and pulled the trigger.

But the pirate was too quick. Ducking 'neath the bullet, he lunged forward with his sword, impaling the other almost to the hilt.

"And if that shot is heard by any o' yon galleons, ye'll all get the same!" roared the buccaneer, glaring upon them.

The remainder of the disarming was accomplished without incident. At last it was done, and the rovers left the cabin, locking the door after them.

"Now to sail her out under the very noses o' the dogs," snarled Handsome.

* * * * *

An hour later the sloop was forging her way through a stiff gale toward the Main, leaving in her wake the pirate isle and galleons of the Knights of Malta.

At dawn came Handsome, Squinty, Dick and Rialto Joe to the cabin, of Brian Carew and his comrade, Neville Hawke.

The "Golden Imp!"

RIALTO, Squinty and Dick wore forbidding expressions on their scarred countenances, but Handsome's villainous face was one great grin. He clapped Brian Carew on the shoulder. "An' now, me hearty, what about those few words as Barbarossa whispered to ye ere he hopped it? Spit 'em out, laddie; we're all comrades here, an' 'twill be share an' share alike a'twixt us—Rip me otherwise!"

Brian Carew remained silent.

Handsome puckered his brows. "What is it, sonny? A-tryin' to keep us in suspense, young rogue! Still, we can understand a joke, eh, friends?"

"I'm not joking," Brian said quietly. "I am quite serious. I will not tell you what Barbarossa said."

Handsome suddenly lost his smile, and his eyes were all a-glitter. He rose and confronted the lad.

"D'ye really mean that?" he asked, softly. Brian nodded firmly. A great oath shot from the buccaneer's lips.

"Then, by hokey! ye will—whether ye like it or not!" he roared. "Rialto—Dick—Squinty! seize 'em both, an' up on deck with 'em."

Resistance was useless. The two lads were hustled ruthlessly out of the cabin. A moment later they found themselves on deck 'neath the grey light of dawn.

Handsome's band of rogues were assembled on the poop. In their midst were grouped the bound figures of ten of the Knights.

Handsome addressed his buccaneers briefly.

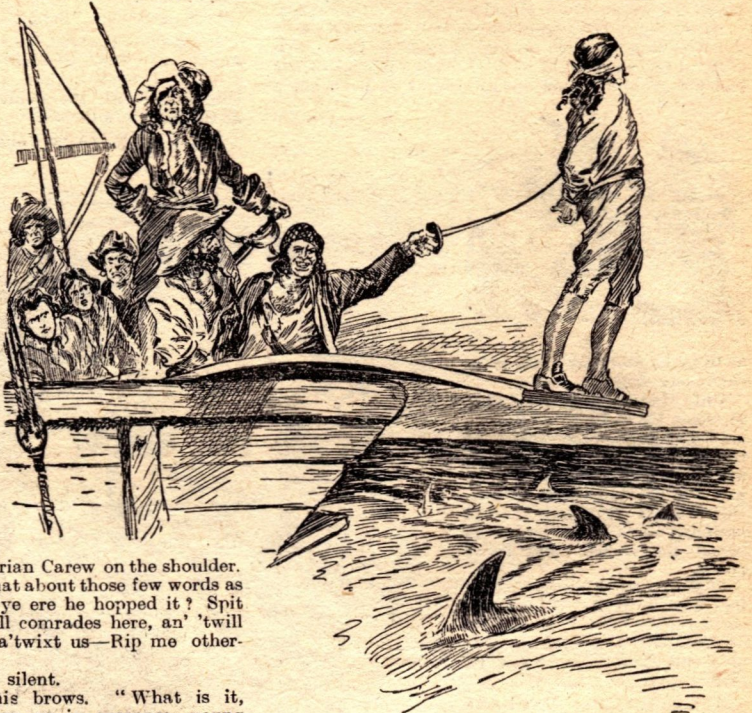
"The lad says as he won't speak, comrades," growled he. "So we'll just give 'im a view o' some-thing' as may cause 'im to change 'is mind. Mister shark about yet, me hearties."

He waited for no reply, but crossing to the bulwarks, stared for a moment, down at the water. Presently he turned, and his face held a fiendish grin.

"Dozens on 'em," he said, with a chuckle. "An' now to start our little show. Bring for'ard one o' yon swabs!"

Neville Hawke glanced quickly at his comrade as a couple of pirates thrust forward a Knight. The horror depicted upon his face was reflected in that of Brian. Instinctively, both glanced at the long plank projecting over the water.

"Brian—Brian! You must save those poor devils!"



TO THE SHARKS WITH 'EM.—The unfortunate man was seized and blindfolded. Two pirates guided him to the edge of the plank where with a thrust of the sword they urged him along his path of doom.

Speak, man! for Heaven's sake!" Neville whispered.

"Stop!" Brian Carew thrust himself in front of Handsome. The Rover stared into the lad's glittering eyes.

"Stop!" Brian repeated. "Handsome, I'll make a bargain with you. You want my secret? I'll give it to you in exchange for the lives of those men."

For a moment the huge buccaneer hesitated. But only for a moment. Suddenly he swore a great oath. "Never, bucko! Never! not for the wealth o' the Indies! Savin' they elect to become gentleman o' fortin' like ourselves, they feed the sharks—every mother's son o' 'em!"

"Then my secret will never be told!"

Handsome winked. "Don't be too sure, me young

spark. I ain't finished yet. There's more to come when these swabs is all gone."

He raised his voice in a fierce roar. "But enough such dilly-dallin'! Here, you"—to the Knight—"Are ye a' goin' to become a gentleman o' fortin and roam the main, free as the air, or are ye goin' to walk yon plank as sharks' meat?"

The Knight drew himself up and his eyes swept Handsome in one scornful glance.

"Sharks' meat a thousand times rather than join such rascally company as yours," said he, haughtily.

Handsome snapped his jaws together. "Right!" he cried. "Get to it, lads! Shove him over!"

In an instant the unfortunate man was seized and blindfolded. Two pirates guided him to the edge of the plank, where, with a push, they urged him along his path of doom.

Brian and Neville watched his progress with fascinated eyes. He strode boldly forward and, reaching the end of the plank, vanished. A splash followed.

The comrades closed their eyes, unable to watch further. But the shouts of the pirates told them all that took place.

Another Knight was thrust forward. This one was ashen-white, and trembled slightly. Nevertheless, the shake of his head in reply to Handsome's query was emphatic enough.

Thus went on the horrible slaughter. As each victim went to his doom the pirates became more and more like fiends. When the last was drawn under by the terrible monsters who swarmed about the sloop, they were literally mad with the lust of blood.

"Now for the young buckos!" yelled a score of voices.

Handsome shook his great head at them. "Ay!" he cried. "But only one—only one, me hearties. An' he won't go if the other tells us what Barbarossa said," and he winked at the comrades.

Neville Hawke went pale as death as he realised the purport of Handsome's words. He shot a glance in Brian's direction. Carew once more confronted the giant rover.

Ere he could speak there sounded the thunder of cannon, and a ball sang through the sloop's rigging.

In an instant every eye sought and found the source of the shot. A huge barque had stolen up unobserved, and was now but a hundred yards away.

Brian cried out joyfully as he espied the flag at her peak.

"The Golden Imp! 'Tis the Golden Imp!"

The End of the Buccaneers:

A SECOND shot boomed forth. This time the ball hummed so low that, instinctively, all ducked. Then Handsome awoke to activity.

Bellowing his orders, he quickly had four star-board cannons manned, and ready to be fired, the while he roared a warning.

"Keep 'em away at all costs, boys! 'Member we're only thirty, an' they, ma'be more'n a hundred! Once let 'em fix grapplin'-irons in us, an' every man-jack'll swing at the yard-arm, sure as ol' Harry Morgan's dead meat!"

Not a voice made reply, but the comrades saw terrible ferocity in every face.

They watched the barque draw nearer with bated breath. They could make out the faces of those aboard, and Brian recognised the powerful figure of his father on the poop. Had he dared he could have hailed him. But such an act spelt instant death.

It was obvious Sir Grant Carew meant to carry the sloop by boarding. In another few minutes both vessels would be alongside one another. A last broadside at close range, and then the grappling irons.

"Fire!" boomed Handsome. *Bang! bang! bang!* The four cannons thundered almost together. The barque reeled as the balls struck her and the pirates roared their approval.

Next moment the *Golden Imp* replied to the buccaneer's fire. The balls hummed among the rigging, while the chain-shot tore chunks of wood from bulwark and mast to send them hurtling in all directions, missiles of horrible death.

Two of the sloop's cannons were dismantled and their crew either killed or mangled. Before the Rovers could do anything to prevent it, both ships touched. In a moment the *Imp's* grappling-irons had locked them together.

In silence—but no less terrible for that—the men of Sir Grant's craft poured on to the deck of the buccaneer, the robbers rising, with awful oaths, to meet them. With the huge figure of Handsome in front they met the onslaught desperately.

Neville and Brian, who, being weaponless, had

(Continued on page 36.)

HIGHWAYMEN, Chaps! Dick Turpin and all His Merry Band of Moonlight Riders appearing in the Long-Promised Yarn of

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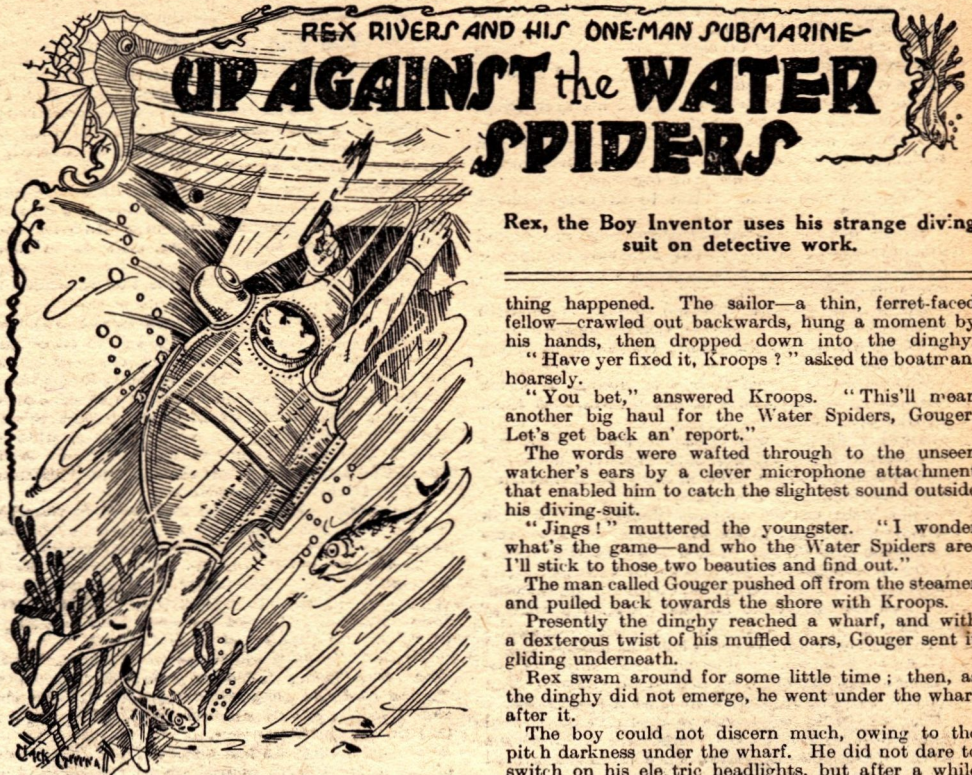
A Tale to Make You Roar and Gasp with Laughter. Just Such a Jovial Tale of Old England as You Can Chuckle Over After the School Homework is Done. And Don't Miss the Spanking Yarn of

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The Mystery of the "Ocean King."

"HES up to no good, surely, rowing with muffled oars—so late at night, too."

Rex Rivers muttered the observation as he gazed through the face-piece of his underwater suit at a slouch-hatted man who was rowing a dinghy across the dark waters of the Mersey.

The youngster was on one of his night trips along the famous river. His diving-suit was a strange apparatus. It had a metallic hull which enclosed his head and body, leaving his limbs encased in flexible rubber, free to move about. At the rear was a tiny propeller, and two strong electric headlights surmounted the beaked face-piece.

Rex had risen to the surface after a spell under water, and had noticed the dinghy being rowed along, its oars muffled with rags to prevent them creaking in the rowlocks, and, scenting a mystery, the youngster resolved to keep the dinghy in view.

So he followed stealthily till the craft stopped alongside a big steamer anchored in mid-river. Rex paddled nearer to read the inscription on the ship's stern—"Ocean King, Liverpool."

A porthole opened, and a thin rope came snaking down. Swiftly the boatman tied one end to a leather case he produced from the bottom of the dinghy. The sailor hauled the case up, and drew it in through the porthole, leaving the dinghy and its occupant still motionless alongside.

Followed a wait of about fifteen minutes. Then the porthole opened again, and another surprising

Rex, the Boy Inventor uses his strange diving suit on detective work.

thing happened. The sailor—a thin, ferret-faced fellow—crawled out backwards, hung a moment by his hands, then dropped down into the dinghy.

"Have yer fixed it, Kroops?" asked the boatman, hoarsely.

"You bet," answered Kroops. "This'll mean another big haul for the Water Spiders, Gouger. Let's get back an' report."

The words were wafted through to the unseen watcher's ears by a clever microphone attachment that enabled him to catch the slightest sound outside his diving-suit.

"Jings!" muttered the youngster. "I wonder what's the game—and who the Water Spiders are. I'll stick to those two beauties and find out."

The man called Gouger pushed off from the steamer and pulled back towards the shore with Kroops.

Presently the dinghy reached a wharf, and with a dexterous twist of his muffled oars, Gouger sent it gliding underneath.

Rex swam around for some little time; then, as the dinghy did not emerge, he went under the wharf after it.

The boy could not discern much, owing to the pitch darkness under the wharf. He did not dare to switch on his electric headlights, but after a while his outstretched hands came into contact with the dinghy's prow. It was some little time before the boy realised the dinghy was empty. Then he risked switching on the headlights. In the sudden brilliant light he saw that the dinghy was tied to an iron ring in the wall. A few feet away a big, dilapidated-looking motor-boat—also empty, and tied to another ring—heaved on the scummy water. Of the two men—Gouger and Kroops—there was no sign whatever. Where, then, had they gone?

There was no landing-place that Rex could see. Rex could only conclude the men had gone through some secret exit. Therefore he hauled himself up into the dinghy and carefully examined the face of the wall.

At first he discovered nothing, then he chanced to twist the iron ring to which the dinghy was attached. The effect was magical. Immediately a secret door swung open, revealing a square tunnel stretching ahead.

Stidious George, the Horn-rimmed Crook.

REX climbed out of his underwater suit and stood wearing ordinary clothes and rubber-soled shoes.

Fixed outside the diving-suit was a patent waterproof pistol, which could be fired in the ordinary way, or under water, as desired. Rex unclipped the weapon, and holding it in one hand and a tiny torch in the other, he went up into the passage and crawled warily along.

The passage went on, bending now left, now right, and sloping gradually downwards. It seemed an

age to Rex before he came to the end of it. Then his torch showed a door before him. Beyond was a vast cellar, lighted by a powerful arc-lamp and dotted with piles of boxes and bales. At the far end was a ladder leading up to a trap-door in the ceiling. Rex thought the two men must have ascended into the regions above, as he could see nothing of them, and he started boldly to explore the place. But he was wrong. For suddenly Gouger and Kroops strolled out from behind a great stack of bales.

Rex caught his breath and dodged behind a big pile of empty packing-cases, and crouched down. For a few tense moments he thought he must have been seen, and his grip tightened on his pistol. Then he breathed freely again—the men had not observed him.

A few minutes later, Rex heard the noise of heavy footsteps on the floor above the cellar, and down the ladder at the far end came half-a-dozen of the most murderous-looking toughs the boy had ever seen.

They congregated in a group with Gouger and Kroops, smoking and talking in low tones.

Rex, straining his ears, caught references to some criminal coup connected with the s.s. *Ocean King*, but what it was he could not gather. As he listened, the youngster realised his position was no safe one, and the touch of his pistol was very comforting. Then—

"Wonder what's keepin' Studious George? We're all 'ere, 'cept the chief," remarked one of the gangsters.

As if in answer, a remarkable-looking man descended the ladder and came towards the group of toughs. He was of slim build, neatly dressed in a well-cut dark suit. His face was keen and studious-looking, and he wore heavy, horn-rimmed goggles.

"I perceive everybody is present," said Studious George, peering through his horn rims at the assembly. "Make yourselves comfortable, and we will proceed to business."

One of the gang brought a chair, and

Studious George sat down. The toughs sat facing him in a crescent.

The gang seemed in awe of this queer crook, Studious George, and they waited in respectful silence for his next utterance. As for the watching boy—he was so interested he forgot the danger of being discovered.

"Well, men," said Studious George, "here we are, assembled in our usual weekly meeting of the society—the Water Spiders—to discuss general matters, share out the proceeds of successful jobs, and plan further ones. It was arranged for the worthy members, Gouger and Kroops, to put the finishing touch to the affair of the *Ocean King* to-night. They are both here, and I take it everything went smoothly?"

"That's so, chief," said Gouger eagerly. "I rowed out wiv the case an' bunged it froo a port'ole to Kroops."

"An' I placed it as per instructions, an' 'opped over the side," added Kroops, with an evil grin.

"Excellent," praised Studious George. "I think we can regard the affair as settled—Why, what's wrong, Gouger?"

Gouger had risen suddenly to his feet, and was staring wide-eyed at the open door of the secret passage.

"I—I'll swear we closed that door be'ind us when we landed back from the river," cried Gouger, pointing. "And—look—now it's wide open! I just noticed it."

Studious George was on his feet, his mouth set grimly. "Has anybody opened the door?" he asked.



A FRIGHTENING VISITANT!—Gripping the side of the crook's craft, Rex confronted the miscreants. At sight of his eerie, beaked headpiece they nearly fainted with fright.

A chorus of excited denials answered him. It was Rex who had left it open. "Then this is most perturbing," said the studious crook, frowning. "It looks as if some spy has followed Kroops and Gouger in. Quick—one of you guard the ladder—another guard that door."

Two of the gangsters leapt to carry out the order, while the rest began to search the cellar systematically.

Cornered, Rex thought swiftly. He resolved to escape the way he had come. The searchers were steadily nearing the big pile of empty packing-cases that screened him, and he realised he must act now.

Tensing himself the youngster suddenly came from behind the packing-cases, and darted towards the tough who was guarding the passage. The fellow gave a warning yell, and swung his right arm up to fire. But Rex was quicker. The boy's pistol roared, and the tough dropped to the floor, a bullet through his shoulder.

The other crooks came rushing at Rex, shooting wildly. One bullet combed the boy's hair—another tore harmlessly through the cloth of his jacket—then he was at the door of the passage. But he paused a moment before making his getaway and aimed his pistol at the big arc-lamp illuminating the cellar. Then—

Bang, crash! Rex's marksmanship was superb—the shot shivered the lamp to fragments, and the light went out.

Amid the blinding darkness Rex sprang into the passage, and went scrambling along it. He heard yells from the cellar, as the baffled crooks rammed into each other in the dark and fell headlong over obstacles.

Onward the boy hurried, and gained the outlet. Springing into the dinghy, he stood reflecting a moment.

A scheme flashed into his fertile brain. He would endeavour to lure the Water Spiders to chase him in the motor-boat. And then—if his idea worked—he would capture them.

As part of his plan, he ejected the cartridges remaining in his pistol, and grabbing some special explosive ones from a receptacle inside his diving suit, rammed them into the magazine. Then the plucky youngster scrambled into his dinky one-man submarine and snapped to the little watertight door.

Then he heard the crooks coming along the passage towards him, and, pistol in hand, he went over into the water with a loud splash. Submerging, Rex set his propeller going; then went rapidly under water away from the wharf.

Rex Wrecks the Crook's Craft.

SCARCELY had Rex dived, ere his foremost pursuer—it was Studious George—appeared framed in the passage exit, a beam from an electric torch he held sweeping the blackness. For a moment the horn-rimmed crook crouched there, then sprang down into the motor-boat, and began feverishly casting off its moorings.

"He dived into the water—I heard a distinct splash," cried George. "We'll go after him in the motor-boat."

One after another, the gangsters emerged from the passage, and leapt down into the boat. Then the boat went *chug-chugging* out into the river, in a vain search for the youngster.

Rex was swimming about in the river depths below, and he resolved to scare the crooks before getting on with his plan for capturing them. The daring boy cleaved up towards the surface until his electric headlights showed the dark keel of the motor-boat above him. The boat was moving slowly along.

Then Rex shot up out of the water and, gripping the

gunwale with his rubber-encased hands, looked over the side. At sight of Rex's eerie beaked head-piece, the crooks nearly fainted with fright.

"E!p! It's one o' them pre'istoric monsters."

"It's a ghost, straight from Davy Jones' locker!!"

These, and similar cries came from the startled crooks, and by the time they had recovered their nerve Rex had dropped back into the water again and disappeared, going right underneath the boat. In this position, he pressed the barrel of his underwater pistol against its keel, near the stern. Then Rex fired several explosive shots up through the hull. The bullets racketed clean into the engine and, bursting, smashed the carburettor, wrecked the propeller shaft, and did other damage.

Its engine out of action, the boat began to drift helplessly out towards midstream. The crooks were mystified, and also in a state of alarm, for water was coming in through the holes made by Rex's bullets. They had to start baling to keep the motor-boat from sinking.

And down in the river depths Rex chuckled to himself. He knew a police patrol boat was due along any moment.

The crooks had managed to stop up the holes that were letting water in, when one of their number raised a cry: "Here come the river cops!"

It was true. The shadowy outline of a police patrol-boat appeared and the beam from a powerful searchlight shone on the gang. The challenging voice of a police-inspector echoed across the water.

The gangsters replied with a ragged volley from their revolvers, but the police, crouching low, avoided the bullets.

Then, with a hump, the police-boat ran alongside, and blue-uniformed men sprang aboard the crooks' craft. Came a short, sharp hand-to-hand fight, in which Rex took part, despite the hampering bulk of his patent suit.

When the fight ended, the Water Spiders—groaning, bruised and bleeding—were stretched, securely handcuffed, in the bottom of their craft.

Rex scrambled out of his strange suit, and told the police-inspector about the events leading up to the capture. The inventive boy was great friends with the river police.

"Jings!" cried the inspector, when Rex had finished. "You've hit on a big mystery, Rex. We'll get these Water Spiders to the station, and make 'em spill the beans about that case they put aboard the *Ocean King*. We can raid their cellar after."

* * * * *

WHEN the Water Spiders were safely lodged in the waterfront police station, Studious George maintained a contemptuous silence, but the others tumbled over one another to turn King's Evidence, with the result that an amazing conspiracy was disclosed.

The police and Rex dashed off to the s.s. *Ocean King*, and they found the case Gouger had put aboard. Kroops, who had shipped as a deck hand, had hidden it in the cargo. The case contained an infernal machine, timed to explode and sink the ship after it had been at sea several days.

Studious George, posing as a respectable business man, had shipped aboard the steamer a cargo of leaden ingots, gilded by a clever process to resemble gold. If the plot had been successful, the *Ocean King* would have been sunk "without trace," and Studious George and the Water Spiders would have drawn a huge sum in insurance for the loss of the supposed gold ingots.

It was a dastardly plot, but thanks to the pluck and alertness of Rex Rivers, it came to naught.

Watch Out for Our School Story Number Next Week.



Just Commencing,
Chaps. Grand New
Series of JIMMY
BRENT, the
Amazing Man About
Town and Mystery
Crook, on Tour
With His Friends
on a Daring Quest.

HURCULANE! That was the magic substance that took James Brent, Esq., Man about Town, to the Dark Continent.

Velasquez, the Big Boss of the Underworld, plotted to use Hurculane for his own crooked ends—for by its use a man's strength was increased a hundredfold. He schemed to compel a black boxer, Sambo Mauley, to take the wonder-drug and, in a meteoric flight to the top of the boxing tree, earn Velasquez a fortune.

But Jimmy Brent knew, and together with Dick Challenger and Sir Martin Anton, Bart., went out to Africa where the mysterious plant, Hurculane, grew in abundance. Sambo went with them, and was suddenly attacked by a huge rhinoceros.

What the others did not know was that Sambo had taken a dose of Hurculane—which he himself had originally discovered in the black depths of Africa—and by its aid he was able to overcome the rhinoceros, much to the awe of the natives of the N'Gwambi tribe who were looking on.

Whilst playing cricket with the natives, a broken creature ran up to Sambo imploring his help. In pursuit came a man with a whip, Velasquez.

Prisoners.

SAMBO gritted something between his teeth. Then he turned to his warriors of the N'Gwambi tribe and spoke to them rapidly.

They ran with joyous alacrity to the huts they had erected, where reposed their spears and other implements of war. For Sambo had told them there was going to be war.

Sambo glared at the pursuing man with the whip, and he showed his clenched white teeth for a moment. Through those gleaming teeth came a grim ejaculation.

"Golly, if dat don't beat cockfighting!"

For the man who ran over the sun-baked ground after Sir Mark Anton was none other than Velasquez. And Sambo had an ancient score to settle with Velasquez. They were not in the London Underworld now, when the Big Boss of crime could threaten Sambo with his power. There was no shadow of a cloneted man in the blue uniform of the police whom Velasquez could conjure up before the black boxer's vision. For that had been a favourite trick of the Big Boss; if his tools and underlings revolted against his authority, he betrayed them to the Law.

They were cast into prison for the things they had done at his behest. He kept a Black Book, and whenever a man "did a job," he was forced to make a full confession in that Black Book, so that Velasquez could use it as evidence against him if he so desired.

But the Black Book had lost its menace now. They were under the scorching glare of the African sun, and Sambo, the chieftain of the N'Gwambi tribe was as good a man—a better man than this villainous Portuguese who had once held him under the repression of his iron hand.

Had he not at his back three score of men who would obey his slightest command?

Sambo burned with a sense of his wrongs. He was all primitive man at that moment. The last indignity Velasquez had put upon him was to make him walk the plank. Well, the time had now come for repayment. And it should be made to the last ounce.

The black cricketer turned to the natives who surrounded him. And he was surprised to find them glaring with awful expressions of ferocity at the shambling figure of Velasquez. There was little doubt of their attitude. It was hostile in the extreme towards Velasquez. Indeed, they were like wild beasts, straining on the leash. They would have run forward to tear the man limb from limb, but Sambo restrained them with a sharp command in their own dialect while he swiftly considered.

Of course! Suddenly he remembered. Was it not Velasquez who had set their greatest enemies, the Osari warriors, upon these men of the N'Gwambi tribe? And Velasquez it was who had commanded the Hotchkiss machine-guns to be fired from the yacht upon the unfortunate N'Gwambi men, riddling their war canoes and sending many of them upon their last journey.

Little wonder that they were so fiercely hostile.

There could be no possible chance of mistaking that gross figure, shambling through the heat haze with the whip in hand. The black brows that nearly met across the bridge of his nose, the spiky moustache and the ragged black beard, all helped to make Henri Velasquez an unsightly and conspicuous figure. The N'Gwambi men had seen him. They had not forgotten. Their hate-ridden rage was rather terrible to witness.

Suddenly they stared at Sambo, even while they obeyed his order to halt. But never had his authority been in greater jeopardy. And, wise man that he was, Sambo saw swiftly that the bonds by which he held these men to him were near to snapping point.

He was thinking—swiftly.

He had come to help Jimmy Brent and his friends. And help them he would, somehow. He knew

with certainty now that they were here. Was not Sir Mark Anton, who was grovelling at his feet, a broken, nerveless creature one of them? Somewhere were Jimmy and the rest of them. And Sambo dearly loved the former man about town and gentleman crook. Every instinct he possessed reared up and advised caution, else he might never see Jimmy's face again.

He turned to the N'Gwambi warriors.

"We will attack, we will tear these white men to pieces, in spite of their sticks that say ha-ha, and spit fire and death," he said in the native dialect. His voice was half scornful, half affectionate, as he thus addressed his tribe.

"But would you go in to fight without weapons?" he went on. "Look, there is not a spear amongst you. And I tell you that there is not one but many of these white men yonder. And they all have the little sticks that make the loud noise."

That was wise caution. The N'Gwambi warriors glaring at Velasquez had seen him halt, and turn apprehensively. All their instinct urged them to pursue him who had done them so much harm. But they understood now that Velasquez had seen them, and if they pursued him, he might lead them into a trap.

"We will get out spears," said the spokesman of the N'Gwambi tribe. "And you shall lead us, O Teeth of Ivory. We will fall upon these white men, and not one shall remain."

"That is good," pronounced Sambo with relief. "That is a very good palaver."

But the next moment he interposed his body forcibly between the natives and Sir Mark Anton, who still lay on the ground. Snarling the N'Gwambi warriors had been about to make for the luckless big game cricketer. Sambo's voice boomed angrily. "Back dogs! Not him!"

The next moment he saw that he had blundered. They turned on him like wild beasts, and he had to exert all his strength to throw half-a-dozen of them off him.

As they would have come on again, he bellowed: "Hear me, fools! It is not now that you would kill this man. You waste time while the others prepare for battle. Afterwards, when we have got them all—then we shall hold a feast, and there shall be many offerings of sacrifices to the God of the Storms."

This was excellent council. Sambo saw many of the warrior's faces brighten. But still there were grumblers amongst them, and others who were suspicious of this new and strange chief.

"He has killed many of our young men," growled the spokesman, who, until lately, had been chief of the tribe, and managed badly to conceal his jealousy and hatred of Sambo. "It is best that he dies quickly, for these white men are learned in the ways of witchcraft, and he may yet escape us."

"I tell you there is a time for all things," declared Sambo with a show of grim antagonism. Suddenly he gripped the warrior's arm, and the face that he thrust forward intimidated the other so that he tried to draw back apprehensively.

"Would you have the secret tortures come to you?" whispered Sambo. "Would you have me cast spells on you?" And at the evidence of fear in the black man's face he added: "Then come; let us arm ourselves with spears and fight as wise men, not fools."

He had convinced them. They turned, running for the huts that in a night almost they had erected from bamboo canes, rushes and reeds. Sambo entered his own hut, where swiftly he divested himself of his now soiled cricketing flannels, and when he emerged he was clad as a warrior chief,

his face painted and wearing a shirt of rushes that revealed everything of his magnificent physique. Bobbing feathers decorated his curly pate, and he wore a huge bone necklace.

It was a brilliant move. The warriors of the N'Gwambi acclaimed him with shouts and cries, and with his spear poised he led them in a run across the plateau that trembled and heaved under the sun's rays.

Sambo had an even deeper motive, however, in thus arraying as the witch doctor of the N'Gwambi warriors. He knew how superstitious, how easily impressed were these natives over whom he held sway. Had not he himself captured their imagination and become their chief simply by a few exhibitions of arts that were commonplace in the Western world?

Vasquez knew this. He knew how to conquer the natives, and Sambo was prepared for trickery. He was deeply versed in the ways of the Big Boss, and he was prepared to meet guile with guile.

Nor did his instincts guide him incorrectly.

As the running warriors, shouting like dervishes, descended upon the plateau, they saw nine men sprawling helplessly on the ground. At once with a pang Sambo recognised them. Jimmy Brent was there, Dick Challenger, Micky Dolan, the big Irishman—all of them save Sir Mark Anton, who was now a prisoner in the warriors' devil hut. They could scarce move, so completely exhausted were they, and they watched the oncoming natives with lack-lustre eyes. But of Velasquez and his followers there was no sign.

Jimmy Brent and Co. were weak from all the privations through which they had gone. They had been unable to partake of even the smallest particle of the Hurculane which they had gathered leaf by leaf for the Big Boss—the marvellous Hurculane which had power to restore their strength and vitality in a few moments—they had not been able to utilise that power because Velasquez had gagged them with cruel tightness. He had gagged them so viciously that they had not strength enough, even in the dead of night, to unloose the hempen cords that bound their mouths like steel traps.

They just retained sufficient strength to crawl over the plateau and pluck the leaf of the Hurculane shrub.

Verily the Big Boss of crime was cunning.

And he had disappeared—disappeared as if off the face of the earth. Unless he and his followers had ventured into the white ruins of the Hidden City, which stood, an age-old relic of a past civilisation under the sun's glow at the edge of the plateau.

But surely they would not have dared venture into that terrible tumble of ruins! So Sambo reasoned as he ran at the head of his warriors, shouting madly to them to stay their hand. But they were eager enough now to take their prisoners alive, these N'Gwambi warriors. There would be devil tortures that night . . . and feasts.

Surely Velasquez would not dare retreat into the Hidden City! Sambo frantically sought to think as he ran. He knew it to be infested with all the creatures of the wilds. As far as hunting was concerned, it was the most magnificent big-game preserve in all Central Africa. Sambo had often thought of leading parties of big-game hunters there—if they dared venture. For there was always the apes. The giant apes!

But there was the business on hand. Sambo checked his thoughts suddenly. As he ran his face expressed horror. For he saw that Jimmy Brent and Co. were preparing to fight.

And, indeed, such was the case. Jimmy Brent, with the desperation of despair wrenched with weak

hands at the gag that secured his mouth. He had been gnawing and tugging hopelessly at that gag for the last three or four days. And now, at the last moment, the miracle happened. A strand snapped, and the wretched thing came loose. Jimmy spat out an oily rag with mingled disgust and infinite relief.

Frantically, like a drowning man clutching at a straw, he grabbed at a tiny particle of the marvellous Hurculeane leaf that lay near-by on the ground. Again luck was serving him. By what chance had the cunning Velasquez left that tiny particle of the wonder drug on the plain? He had been assiduous in his endeavours to keep it away from his slaves. But there it was—a crumb that remained.

Jimmy's broken nails split a tiny piece of the portion of dried leaf, and he swallowed it. Instantly he felt the wonderful reviving effects. He was a new man—a strong man—in a moment. He dragged out his pocket knife and swiftly cut the gags of the four men nearest to him.

"Quick, chaps! They're coming. The sav—"

He choked off the word as a six-foot savage leapt at him with spear uplifted. He got his head up against the warrior's waist, his arms locked about his knees and toppled him backwards. Then a dropping spear drove into the fleshy part of his leg, and he pitched over, grappling with it desperately, for it was pinning him to the ground.

Over him the hopeless fight raged. Micky Dolan was down, under three writhing savages. Dick Challenger was lying still, with blood trickling from his forehead, and the howling shapes pressed on the others, who were too weak to fight.

They were prisoners of the savages.

Then began the hideous march back over the reeking plateau. In single file the warriors carried their burdens—and, mercifully, most of the big-game cricketers were unconscious by now—and only Jimmy Brent knew of it when they reached the dome-shaped grass huts.

They came to a circular hut whose exterior suggested nothing so much as a crocodile with gaping jaws. Into its shadowed interior they were flung unceremoniously and left.

Suddenly, Jim heard a voice, and he was surprised to recognise it as Sir Mark Anton's. Mark, who had run with the strength born of despair from the flaying whip of Velasquez into the hands of the enemy.

"The devil house," he whispered. "We're for it, Jimmy."

The one-time man-about-town laughed. But there was no mirth in the sound of it.

Sambo Steps In.

THEY were left in peace for many hours. Jimmy Brent and Sir Mark Anton slept, and when they woke again they saw through the opening of the hut the cold gleam of stars. More than that—they saw something that, in spite of their condition, caused them to stare in amazement.

In the sky appeared hissing showers of fire-coloured fire. There were explosions of coloured fire stars, rainbow trails across the dark vault of the heavens—and there was the accompaniment of many loud explosions.

"Am I dreaming?" whispered Jimmy Brent. "Or am I at the Crystal Palace?"

"They're fireworks all right," supplemented Sir Mark Anton. After a long sleep he had become almost normal again.

Fireworks in the heart of the devil-land of Africa! They watched in wonder, until at length the fireworks ceased, to be replaced by the sound of tom-toms and the cries of the savages out in the night.

"They're getting ready for their feast, anyhow," muttered Jimmy grimly. "Jove," he added as a sudden afterthought. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if those fireworks weren't one of Velasquez's tricks to get over the natives. He's full of cunning wheezes like that."

Even as he muttered this to himself a gigantic black figure with a headdress of nodding plumes became silhouetted in the doorway, as the curtain of rushes was dragged aside. Jimmy Brent's lips framed a voiceless whisper.

"The witch doctor!"



THE WITCH DOCTOR.—A gigantic black figure, with a headdress of nodding plumes, became silhouetted in the doorway. It came over the bamboo floor with the sinuous gliding movement of a snake. Jimmy's lips framed a voiceless whisper.

He stepped into the hut and came over the bamboo floor with the sinuous gliding movement of a snake. And, behind him, with a horrid, evil smile on his boarded face, came Henri Velasquez!

The witch doctor stopped in front of Jimmy Brent. The gentleman crook stared at him, and the thought came to him that save for the streaks of paint on the shining black face, this was a very handsome type of African savage.

Henri Velasquez was the first to break the silence with a high-pitched, mirthless chuckle.

"There you are," he said shrilly, with suitable gestures. "Nine white men for your devil tortures. What do you say?"

The witch doctor shook his head, however. Save for a single native who held a flaming brand to light the devil house, he had none now to notice his treatment of the Big Boss. He had been very cunning, this witch doctor, but now he could repress himself no longer. Exerting all his strength, and mouthing strangely, he pushed Velasquez towards the door, and, scowling savagely, the villain went.

When he had gone the witch doctor came back, and grinned down at the prisoners. Jimmy felt his heart beating madly as he stared at that face. Somehow . . . it seemed vaguely familiar.

Then he heard a voice—a voice that he knew only too well.

"It's all right, massa," the voice said with a true negro chuckle. "It only me—Sambo. But dem debbels outside, waiting to take you to de religious ceremony. So speak carefully."

"Begorrah!" leapt to Micky Dolan's breathless lips. "It's old Sambo!"

"It am dis chile all right," chuckled Sambo. "But watch yore steps. We've got a long way to go yet."

And he was silent, staring out through the beaded door of the devil house where the big game cricketers, following his gaze, could see the big camp fires, their flames leaping to the sky in a blaze of red. And the tom-toms throbbed without pause, their message plain. There were to be sacrifices and a ceremony that night, and the nine white men were to take a prominent part in the proceedings.

Can Sambo help the Big Game Cricketers to Escape? What Hold has Velasquez gained on the Native Tribe? Jimmy Brent and Co. appear to be in a bad case, eh? But just wait until you Read Next Week's Exciting Chapters.



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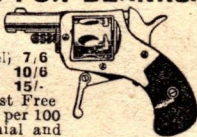
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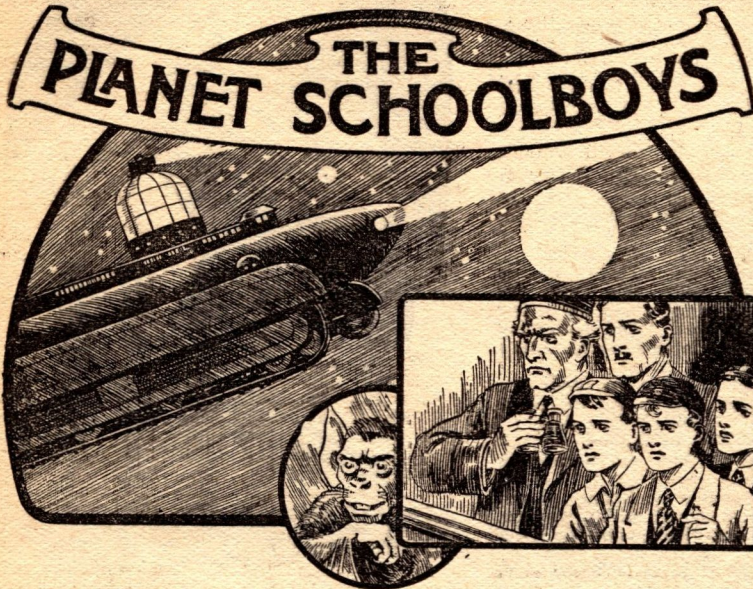
Athletic News

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By EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

BY Starship to the Planet Venus! That was the gigantic journey undertaken by Professor Drewe, Sir Clarence Bagshot (nicknamed Sir Bags), and a crowd of juniors from the Fourth Form as Castleton School. Incredible adventures met them on the White Planet. They found it peopled by a nation of winged beings ruled by a yankee, who had reached Venus in a projectile ten years before.

Now Hudson Zeff—that was the American's name—did not propose to yield his prestige to these marvellous newcomers and he shut them out of the city just as the terrible Venusian night came down.

Fearful monsters who only roamed in the darkness threatened to destroy the *Solar Rover* but the adventurers managed to escape—only to be faced with another evil.

They were flying over a sea of mud when a mighty geyser swamped them with the glutinous substance. Under the tremendous weight the starship was forced down . . . down . . . down . . . "It's the end," the Professor said in great agitation.

Touch and Go.

THAT'S cheerful!" said Bags, steadily. He accepted the dread news with all his philosophical calm. He walked to the nearest window, and stood looking out—over the for'ard decks.

The scene was a staggering one. Many of the searchlights were still working, although others had been smothered in the mud, and were out of action. But the decks were clearly visible—piled up with thick, sticky mud. The weight of it must have been enormous, as was proved, indeed, by the inability of the vessel to rise.

From every side came the spurts of mud—shooting upwards in terrific cascades. The geyser appeared to be an enormous thing—a mile or two, possibly, in diameter. As far as the eye could see, within the radius of the searchlights, the "land" was bubbling

and boiling and sending forth showers of warm mud. "After all, we mustn't grumble," said Bags, glancing round. "This mud has saved young Robin's life. That's something to be thankful for, anyway."

"But we shall all be killed if this keeps on!" said Professor Drewe tensely. "Don't you realise that, Clarence? We are less than ten feet above the mud—and we are dropping slowly, although my 'energy-motors' are working at their highest pressure. We can do nothing—for we are at the mercy of these Venusian elements."

Mr. Mannering came running in, and the young schoolmaster's face was alight with alarm.

"We're nearly touching by the stern!" he panted. "And the mud is so thick on the deck that nobody can go out! It's piled high everywhere, and—"

"Whoa!" interrupted Bags. "Look out, there! Here we go!"

With a slow, sickening movement, the *Solar Rover* was toppling over to starboard—her equilibrium completely upset by the weight of mud on her decks.

The Professor clung desperately to his levers and Mr. Mannering went sliding down the deck, which had assumed an acute angle. Bags, at the window, found himself pressed against the glass. The vessel was heeling further and further over until she was practically on her beam ends.

And then, with a slithering, rushing, oozing noise, the mud went shooting off from the decks, owing to the steep angle. At the same second there came another outburst from the geyser, and they could feel the mud being hurled against the outer plates.

With a wild lurch, in which every loose object went crashing over, the *Rover* righted herself, and then shot upwards by the bows. For a second or two she reeled giddily, swaying up and down as though a gigantic hand were worrying her. And then she became steady, and Professor Drewe uttered a shout of relief.

"We're free!" he exclaimed. "The mud has fallen away, and we are rising!"

"Well, we do have some fun, anyway," said Sir Bags coolly.

He walked across to the Professor and glanced at the indicators.

"We are rising rapidly now," said the inventor. "Thank heaven for this release! I began to believe, Clarence, that we were doomed."

"Keep on rising until we're about five thousand miles into the air!" said Bags. "I'm a great chap for excitement, but I rather fancy we've had enough for the time being. We'd better get the crew to work, swabbing the decks!"

He went down from the control-room and found the boys excitedly talking in the lounge. They, of course, were aware of the change in the situation, and they were all looking flushed.

"We're rising, aren't we, sir?" asked Barry.

"You bet we are!" said Bags. "There's no more danger, you fellows. What about Robin?"

"He's below, sir—with the major and one or two other fellows," said Don Masters. "And the rummy thing is he doesn't seem to be injured at all! Just a bruise or two and nothing else."

"It takes a great deal to kill a youngster like Robin Hardy," nodded Sir Bags. "All the same, he's a lucky young beggar. What's it like outside?" he added, turning towards the closed door.

"You can't go out, sir—the decks are choked with mud," said Barry.

The *Rover* was in a pitiable condition. Almost every inch of her was coated with sticky, clinging, glutinous mud. Her beauty had gone—her silver glory was no more.

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Bags as he gazed upon the decks. "The men can never clear this stuff away! And if it dries here we shall—"

"Why not take her towards the sea, sir, and give her a dip?" suggested Barry. "The sea is only just beyond the big city, and every door and window can be hermetically sealed. Why not give her a bath?"

"Gad, that's a pretty good idea," said Sir Bags, nodding. "I'll put it to the Prof, and hear what he has to say."

The Professor was enthusiastic.

"An excellent suggestion, Clarence!" he declared. "The sea, of course! Why did I not think of that simple expedient? We will land on the beach, and then plunge into the water by means of our tractors. If we act at once the mud will soon wash away."

"Just what I was thinking," said Sir Bags, nodding. "But if we wait until daylight comes, most of this mud will be caked on hard—and then we shall never be able to wash it off. The great question is, where's the sea?"

But the Professor was in no difficulty. The *Solar Rover* was now flying at a height of about fifty thousand feet, and the inventor turned her about, and brought her lower and lower. Everything beneath was utterly black—everything all around was black. Never had these humans seen such inky darkness.

But the searchlights served them well. For, descending lower, the powerful lights were soon able to pick out the immense buildings of the Venusian city. And beyond lay the sea, black and mysterious.

A Narrow Escape.

ONE more plunge, and we'll be fairly clean," said Mr. Manning.

He and Sir Bags were standing at the window of the control-room. The *Solar Rover* had just trundled out of the water, after several such excursions. And most of the mud had fallen away—had been washed off her docks and her plates. But there was still a certain amount left, and the



TO SAVE HIS CITY.—From the top of the great building Hudson Zeff waved his hands frantically. "Turn off the lights!" he shouted.

Professor was turning the vessel round in order to make another journey into the water. It was quite safe to do so, since every window and door was hermetically sealed. Just as the *Rover* could soar with impunity through the realms of Outer Space—atmosferaless and incredibly cold—so she could sink beneath the water. And the *Rover* was not exactly a submarine. The Professor had never designed her as such. Yet, by using her tractor wheels, she could enter the sea at the beach and claw her way along the ocean bed.

"It would be better if we could get more speed," said the Professor. "I am afraid the remainder of the mud will have to be washed away with brooms and mops. It would help us, indeed, if the sea was rough. But this strange ocean appears to be tideless—stagnant—motionless."

"Well, never mind," said Sir Bags. "We've got most of the stuff off, and now I vote that we rise a few hundred feet into the air and cruise through Venusville."

"Don't we get any sleep to-night?" smiled Mr. Manning.

"Well, Jerry, I suppose we ought to think about sleep—but I'm a curious sort of beggar," replied Bags. "These Venusians are in mortal fear of the night monsters. I just want to see if any of those beetle-horrors are crawling about the city streets."

"And what if they are?" put in the Professor.

"Well, we might have a bag at one of them," replied the sporting baronet with a grin. "I'm jolly keen on big game hunting, you know. We shall have some good sport, potting these blighters."

"It is quite a good suggestion," said Professor Roxley Drewe, nodding. "I must confess that I am very curious on my own account. We cannot do better than fly over the city and examine it by means of our searchlights. But I rather think the boys should be sent to bed."

"Try to send them!" said Bags with a chuckle.

Mr. Mannering suddenly became rigid, and he stared out through the window.

"Quick!" he muttered. "What's this, Bags?"

The *Rover* was on her way out of the water now—although she was still completely submerged. She was lumbering along, with the water pressing against her plates, and against the glass windows and dome of the control-room. At first the explorers had rather hoped to see some signs of fish. But nothing had been seen whatever of that nature. Now, however, Jerry Mannering pointed, and Sir Bags found his attention becoming fixed.

"Funny!" he muttered, staring.

It seemed to them that a vast black bulk had slid alongside the *Rover*. They could hardly tell whether it was a darkened patch of ocean or whether it was something more tangible. It was like an immense shadow—a mysterious thing which loomed out of the blackness of the sea in the range of the gleaming searchlights.

"What is the matter?" asked Professor Drewe, noticing the rigid attitudes of his companions.

"Hanged if I know," said Sir Bags. "But it seems to me that there's something—"

"It is becoming increasingly evident that Venus is a planet of deadly danger at night," said Professor Roxley Drewe. "During these black hours there are strange and horrific things abroad. We have had ample evidence of this. While being aware of these dangers, I am nevertheless intrigued. We are making many wonderful discoveries, my friends. We are contributing enormously to the world's scientific knowledge."

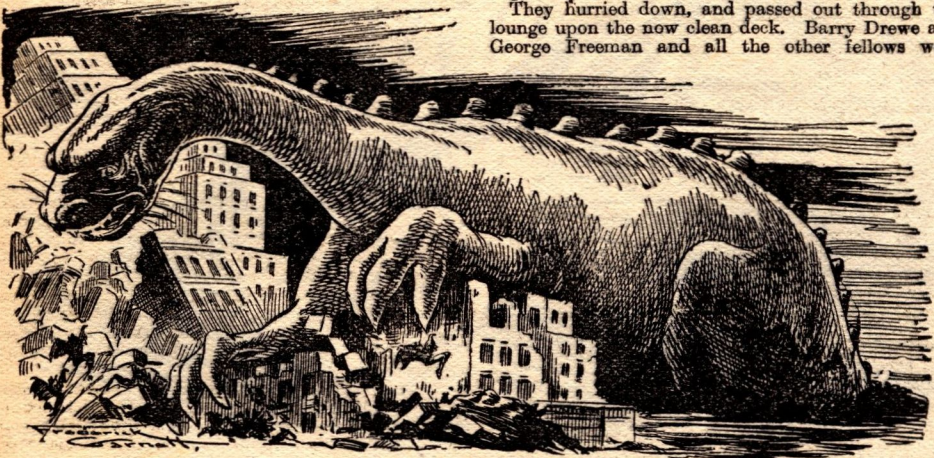
"I absolutely agree," said Bags. "But, at the same time, Prof, we don't take quite the same view as you do. I'd give a fortune to know what that was rubbing against us in the sea. But the scientific viewpoint doesn't interest me in the least."

The Professor shook his head.

"I am very much afraid, Clarence, that you are a hopeless case," he said sadly. "If ever we get on speaking terms with Mr. Hudson Zeff again, we must question him regarding this night life of Venus. It is most probable that he will be able to give us some very interesting information."

"Well, let's go on deck and have a look at the city," said Mr. Mannering. "The boys are out there already, the young rascals! It is like their impudence!"

They hurried down, and passed out through the lounge upon the now clean deck. Barry Drewe and George Freeman and all the other fellows were



THE DREAD THING WREAKS CHAOS.—There came a tumultuous crashing of stone as the Venusian house collapsed under the weight of the gigantic horror that had come to Venusville.

"What's that?" shouted Mr. Mannering.

Something was slithering against the side of the vessel—with a soft, slogging sound. It was uncanny in the extreme. And then, immediately afterwards, came a rocking of the entire vessel, as though an incredibly enormous bulk was trying to topple her over. The black mass outside the window heaved and rolled, and then it could be seen no more.

The *Rover* emerged from the water upon the strange beach, cascades of moisture pouring from her decks and over her plates. And Sir Clarence Bagshot and Jerry Mannering found themselves looking at one another in a queer sort of way.

"If you ask me, we've had another narrow escape," said Jerry. "There was something in the water with us."

"Something!" echoed Sir Bags. "By the Lord Harry! I should say there was! About five times as big as a whale, I should imagine!"

"We'd better get into the air," said Mr. Mannering hoarsely.

And a moment later the *Rover* was soaring aloft—clean once more.

out there, standing against the rail, looking downwards at the big patches of ground that were illuminated by the searchlights. One of the first juniors Sir Bags came across was Robin Hardy.

"Hallo, young 'un," said Bags, patting Robin on the back. "Feeling better?"

"Rather, sir," said the Third Former. "I'm all right now."

"Strictly speaking, you ought to be in bed!" said Sir Bags sternly. "I rather think it's my duty to send you below at once."

"We don't always do our duty, sir," grinned Robin. "Come to the rail, and let's have a look at the city."

And at that moment a series of shouts were heard from all the other boys, and Sir Bags and Robin hurried to the rail.

The Thing from the Sea.

BY this time, the *Rover* was flying slowly over the heart of Venusville. The great buildings could be seen just below. Professor Drewe was causing the vessel to drift along at such a slow speed that she

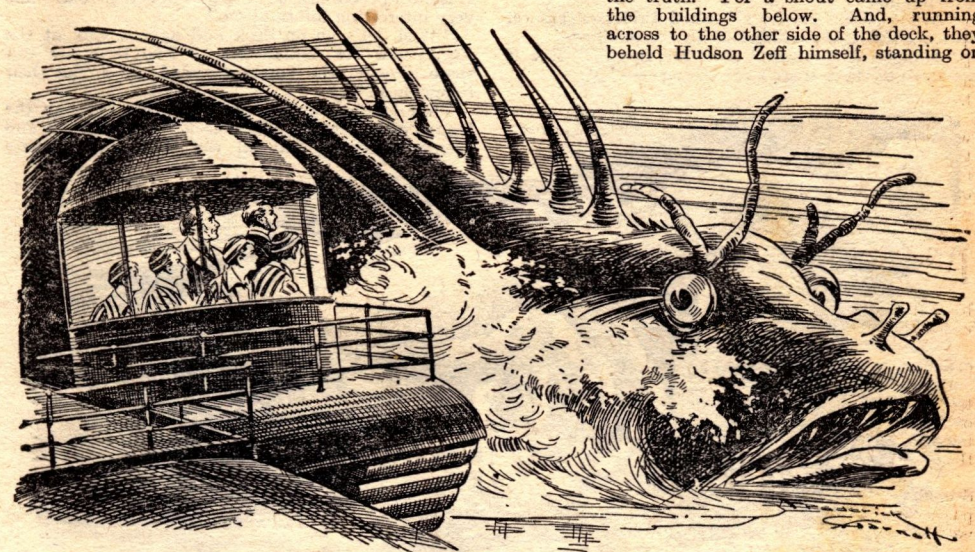
was almost hovering. And the tops of the great buildings were only a few feet below.

But nobody took any notice of the tops of the buildings. The attention of everybody was attracted by the scenes in the marble streets. For there, in every direction, were hordes of those repulsive beetle-creatures, with their long feelers clutching at the walls, feeling in the nooks and crevices. Without doubt, these monstrous things were attempting to gain entry—so that they could seize upon their prey.

Small wonder, indeed, that the Venusians built their houses of enormous strength, with windows that could be blocked up as soon as darkness came.

"What horrid things!" said Freckles Smith, with a little shudder. "Oh, crums! Did you ever see such ugly brutes in all your life? And to think that poor old Robin was seized by one of them!"

"No need to remind me of that, you ass!" said



THE SEA HORROR.—Something was slithering against the side of the vessel. It was uncanny in the extreme. Came a rocking of the entire vessel as though an incredibly enormous bulk was trying to topple her over.

Robin. "Look at 'em! Scuffling away in every direction! They don't like our lights."

This was certainly the explanation of the stampede below, in the streets. The beetle-like monsters were scampering away out of the range of the bright searchlights. There were many hundreds of them—indeed, thousands, all told—counting those beyond the range of lights. The whole city was swarming with the horrors.

And this sort of thing, no doubt, occurred every night! As soon as that intense blackness fell, so the day life of Venus ceased. And the night life commenced—with these diabolical things in full command of the planet's surface. And it rather stunned the explorers when they realised that they had only glimpsed, perhaps, on the very outskirts of this marvel. Perhaps there were other creatures—too awful to imagine.

Before long the streets were quite clear. The monsters had taken alarm, and had all scurried away. And now Venusville was free of them. Over

the great central square the *Solar Rover* hovered, and the schoolboys were excited by the fact that a number of flashlight photographs had just been taken—by order of Professor Roxley Drewes. The magnesium had blazed out several times, converting that blackness into dazzling brilliance. And several excellent photographs of the fleeing monsters had been obtained.

"I can't quite understand it, you know," said Barry, frowning. "If our searchlights will keep these awful things away, why don't the Venusians keep fires burning everywhere—in a circle, for example, round the city limits?"

"Yes, it does seem rummy, doesn't it?" replied Billy Ward. "Even if the Venusians couldn't think of a thing like that, what's wrong with old Zeff? Why didn't he institute such fires? It seems so obvious."

A moment later they had a vague indication of the truth. For a shout came up from the buildings below. And, running across to the other side of the deck, they beheld Hudson Zeff himself, standing on

the top of one of the great buildings. He had apparently emerged from a stone trapdoor on the flat roof. He was waving his hands wildly, and he looked a grotesque figure as he stood there—his misshapen body casting strange, fantastic shadows.

"The lights!" he was shouting. "Turn the lights off!"

The *Rover* lowered herself somewhat, and drifted nearer.

"Go!" roared Hudson Zeff, in tones of alarm. "Go from this city and turn your lights off!"

"Why, do you want those beetles to come back?" shouted Sir Bags. "We thought we were doing you a good turn—"

"Fools—fools!" screamed Hudson Zeff. "There are other perils on this planet! Just as the light frightens some of these night monsters, so it attracts others—as moths are attracted. You do not know the peril you are bringing—"

He broke off, and the next moment he uttered a wild, anguished cry.

"Too late!" he shouted huskily. "The danger is upon us!"

He was staring fixedly in one direction—towards that part of the city which was nearest the sea. Two of the searchlights swung round, and played upon the buildings there. And then the adventurers found their attention fixed, and they became rigid with new horror.

A monstrous thing was coming into the streets of this Venusian city—a vast, lumbering creature, measuring not less than half-a-mile in length—and towering up hundreds and hundreds of feet.

"Great Scott!" gasped Freeman. "Am I mad? Can you fellows see this thing, too?"

"Look at it!" breathed Barry Drew.

There it was—a black, towering horror—in shape something like a brontosaurus of prehistoric times on earth. There was a great tapering neck, with a dragon-like head at the end of it. And a vast body, which dragged itself over the ground, and left a great trail of slimy wetness.

And then, as all looked, this great horror of the Venusian night seized upon one of the great buildings. There came a vast crashing of stone, a thunderous thudding and hammering. The building collapsed amid a cloud of dust, and with the shrieks of the hapless Venusians rising upon the night air.

And further away more of these great monsters were coming to the attack—to the destruction of this city. And they had been attracted there by the lights of the *Solar Rover*. All unconsciously, the explorers had brought disaster upon Venusville.

The Fight to Save the City.

FASCINATED, horrified, the adventurers stared down upon the destruction below. For the first moment they were all stricken with a feeling of helplessness. The whole affair was so staggeringly unexpected.

"What can we do, sir?" asked Barry Drew, clutching at Sir Clarence Bagshot's sleeve.

"Heaven knows," replied Bags. "But we've got to do something! We can't let these poor beggars of Venusians be murdered under our very eyes. We brought this trouble on the city, and we've got to put things right."

"But how can we?" asked Mr. Mannering in despair. "These monsters are bigger than any prehistoric creature of earth. This one, alone, is wrecking the buildings as though they were dolls' houses! And there are others coming, Bags—many of them!"

"They're attracted by our lights," said Freeman excitedly. "Why can't we switch them off?"

"We're in a quandary, young 'un," said Bags grimly. "If we switch the lights off, we shan't be able to see what we're doing. And if we keep them on, they will only attract more and more of these monsters. And I doubt if it will be of any use to turn the lights off now. The damage has been done—the monsters are here. We'd better fight them and drive them off."

"But how, sir?" panted Barry.

"Let me think for a moment," muttered Bags. "By the Lord Harry! What a predicament! Now we can understand, of course, what it was rubbing against our plates while we were under the sea. It was one of these horrible blighters."

He hurried away to consult with Professor Drew, and the boys, in the meantime, remained at the rail—staring downwards. There was much to be seen—much to fill them with excitement and dread.

So far, only one of the Venusian buildings had been demolished, and the sea-monsters had not been very lucky in the way of victims. For most of the Venusians had escaped from its clutches—and had

sought refuge in one of the other great marble structures. But how long could this last?

There were more of these dreadful things coming—they could be seen in the darkness, looking up like vast towering nightmare creations. Unless something was done at once, nothing could save Venusville from utter destruction. Nothing could save these peaceful inhabitants from a horrible death.

"We're going lower!" shouted Puggy Dibble suddenly. "What's the matter? Oh, crumbs! We're sinking all the time!"

"Yes, and look!" panted Don Masters. "One of the big guns is being swung round. They're going to start firing!"

An excited cheer went up from the Castleton schoolboys. But Puggy Dibble was trembling with sheer fright. And so, for that matter, were Hoskins and Leslie Royce.

"We ought to fly right away!" shouted Puggy, his voice quivering with utter terror. "Why can't we get right up into the air? It's madness to stay here—and fight these terrible things. They'll only kill us!"

"And what about these Venusians?" demanded Freeman aggressively.

"We can't help their troubles," said Puggy.

"You rotter!" roared the leader of the Firm. "You ealious boulder! We brought this trouble on the city, and we've got to—"

"Look out, there!" came a shout from Sir Bags. "All you boys clear away—get in the lounge."

"But we want to see—"

"I don't care what you want to see!" thundered Sir Bags. "Into the lounge—all of you." There's trouble going to start."

Zurrrrrh!

Suddenly a terrific whirring and buzzing commenced—accompanied by terrific quick-fire explosions. The boys understood the meaning of it at once. Two or three machine guns had got into action.

The battle had commenced.

The *Solar Rover* was now flying quite low. Professor Drew was at the controls, and he was handling his wonderful aircraft with consummate skill. Down she went, lower and lower, and the machine guns sent a hail of bullets into the Brontosaurus-like monster which had commenced its deadly work on the city.

At first there was no result. The great creature took no notice—but continued its destruction.

Boom—boom!

A shattering explosion sounded as one of the *Rover's* big guns got into action. The range was appallingly short. The shell struck the sea-monster in the middle of its body, and exploded with a dazzling, blinding flash.

"That's the stuff!" roared Sir Bags, as he leapt to the rail and stared down. "We've got him, Jerry. He's winged!"

"Thank goodness!" panted Mr. Mannering.

He joined the sporting baronet at the rail, and they could see the monster writhing helplessly—a great gaping wound in its side. Its long, tapering neck was wavering about, and there was a smother of foam on its dragon-like mouth. Then the whole thing sagged and became still—lying there, amidst the wreckage it had created.

Sir Bags wiped his brow.

"Well, that's one of 'em!" he said breathlessly. "And we've proved that we can kill these horrors. If only we can drive the others off, before they can start any of their parlour tricks, there won't be much harm done."

Can the Space Voyager overcome the teeming monsters that beset them? Take a pal with you for next week's Mag—you'll be putting him on to a good thing



THE PIRATES OF DEMON ISLE—

(Continued from page 23.)

moved out of range of the combatants, watched the fray with bated breath.

Sir Grant Carew, in the van, singled out Handsome as the buccaneer singled out him. Uttering a fierce bellow of fury, the latter sprang forward, waving his great sword above his head.

Sir Grant ducked 'neath a sweep of the blade, at the same time lunging with his rapier. By a miracle Handsome evaded the thrust, then swung down his weapon in a terrible stroke.

Had it landed, Sir Grant must have been cloven from forehead to chin. As it was he only darted back in the nick of time. The sword struck his rapier, breaking it at the hilt. Handsome roared triumphantly and lifted his blade for the fatal stroke.

Seeing his father's peril Brian snatched up a pistol from the grasp of a dead pirate and sprang forward. The lad brought the butt crashing down upon the buccaneer's head. Without a groan Handsome dropped senseless to the deck, his sword clattering by his side.

Seeing the fate of their leader the remainder of the *Rovers* lost heart. Four or five continued to battle on, the spectre of the yard-arm before their eyes. Desperately though they fought, the overwhelming number of the foe soon overcame them.

Squinty was the last to fall. Engaged by three men at once he gradually gave ground until, of a sudden, he espied the limp form of Handsome. Instantly, the expression of a devil sprang into his face.

With one superhuman effort he broke past those who surrounded him, and rushed upon the senseless buccaneer with upraised sword. "I'm done, but so'll ye be—ye dirty traitor!" he bellowed, and brought down his weapon.

Crack!

It was Handsome who fired. With recovering consciousness, he just found sufficient strength to draw the pistol from his waistband.

Squinty took the ball in the throat. Stopping dead in his tracks, a strange expression crossed his face. He stood upright for the fraction of a second.

Then his whole body seemed to sag foolishly, and he subsided to the deck.

* * * * *

TWO hours later the comrades were recounting their adventures to Sir Grant in the private cabin of the *Golden Imp*.

With Sir Grant was Jeremiah Sword, his first lieutenant, and Paul Trevelyn, his friend and comrade. The surviving buccaneers, ten of them, including

Handsome, were under guard aboard the barque, in whose tracks sailed the much-battered sloop with a crew provided from among the complement of the *Golden Imp*.

Brian Carew had just finished his story, and a certain question was trembling upon Sir Grant's lips when there came a hasty knock upon the cabin door.

In answer to Sir Grant's summons a sailor burst unceremoniously in, and without any ado, stammered out.

"Handsome, sir! He's escaped!"

All sprang to their feet. Sir Grant grasped the man's arm.

"Handsome escaped! Impossible! How, man, could he do so?"

"Can't say, sir," was the reply. "He was with the others in a cabin, an' a guard outside of the door. But when Sam Lee looked in to see if they was all right, he was gone, clean as a whistle, an' the others wouldn't say nothin'."

It was quite true. Sir Grant had the barque searched from deck to keel and stem to stern; but without result. The huge buccaneer had vanished as though into thin air.

"Well," observed Sir Grant, as, presently they returned, disgruntled, to the cabin. "The water is the only way he could have gone. In that case he's dead by this, for master shark is not over particular about his food.

"And now, Brian," he said, turning to his son. "Just tell us what it was Barbarossa actually did say to you ere he died."

"Only this, Father: 'Jeremy Wierd's treasure is lying at the bottom of Demon Lake on this very isle'; he died with the last word upon his lips."

Sir Grant nodded slowly.

"A jester he lived, and a jester he died," quoth he. "Aha! I can see the point in his humour. He unfolded his secret to you that he might have a final jest with his wolves. Alas! 'Tis a pity he is gone, for, with his great red beard he would have graced any yard-arm."

He rose with a sigh, and turned to gaze out of the port-hole.

Of a sudden he wheeled to confront them with shining eyes.

"But there remains Demon Isle, the lake, and the treasure. Someday, mayhap, we may all go a' search of the treasure of Jeremy Wierd!"

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