

THE WAR ON WINGS! VIVID, THRILLING YARN OF BRITAIN IN HER DREAD HOUR OF PERIL FROM AIR INVASION.

Boys' ^{2D} Magazine

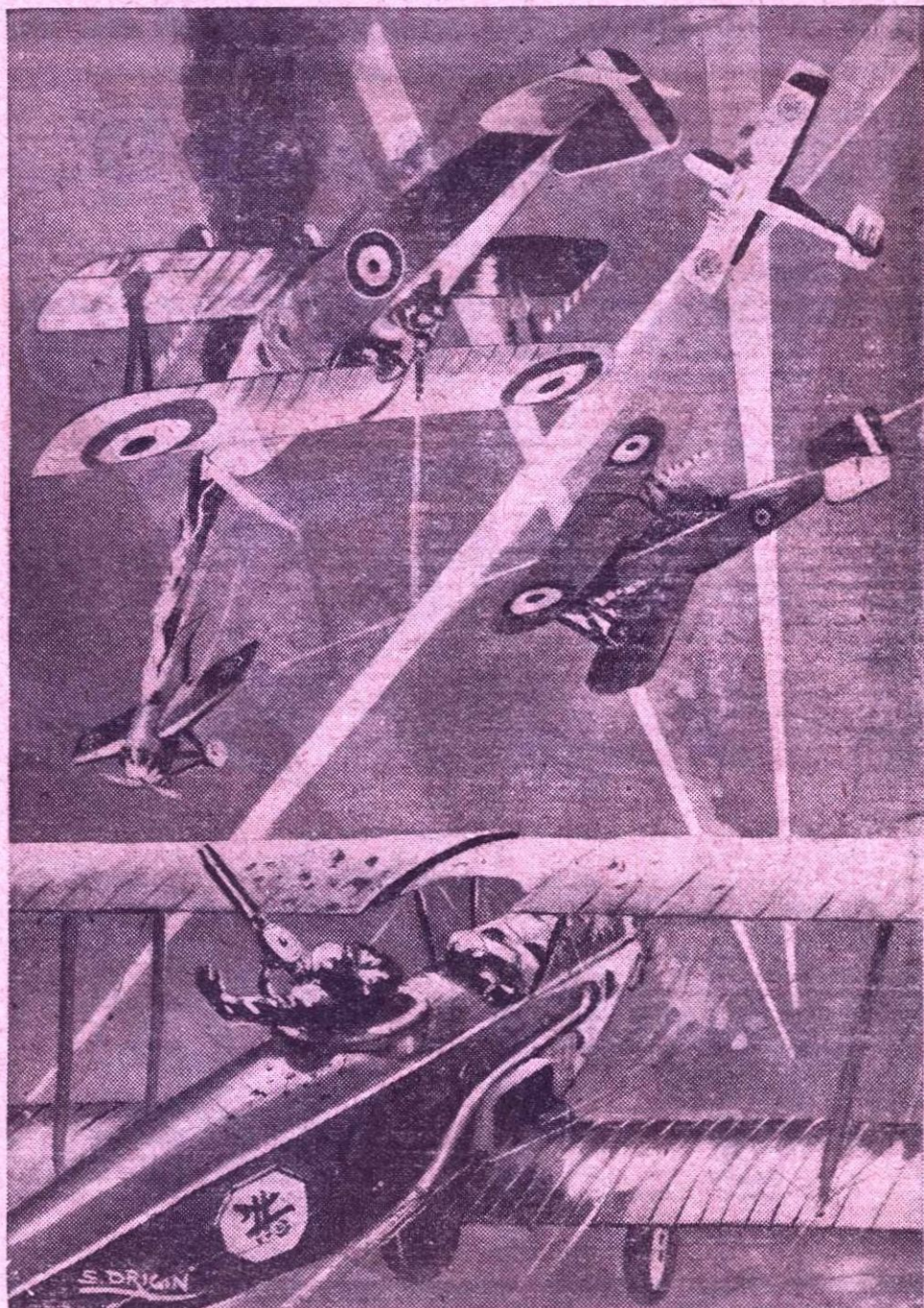
EVERY SATURDAY



MIGHTY MELODRAMA OF THE CLASH IN THE CLOUDS STARTS TO-DAY.

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THE AIR BATTLE STARTS.— With a mighty effort of will the young Air Marshal hung on a moment longer. Then, "Let 'em have it!" he roared into the wireless megaphones. And the air shook with the crash of the British guns.—A THRILLING INCIDENT FROM THE MIGHTY TALE OF AIR WAR THAT STARTS TO-DAY.

COMMENCING TO-DAY! This Vivid, Thrilling Yarn of the Clash in the Clouds. A Remarkable Forecast of the Next War.



It's Come At Last!
The Great and Thunderous
War Story That Will
Keep You Gripped in
Breathless Interest.
Meet "Tornado"
Crichton, The Marvel Man of the Skies, The
Famous Young Air Marshal and Leader of the
Flying Forces in whom Great Britain Places All
Her Faith and Trust in Her Dread Hour of Peril
and Anxiety.

War Has Been Declared. You Must Read This
Wondrous Tale of the New War In The Air.

By P. RUSSELL MALLINSON (Late R.A.F.)

Illustrated by S. Drigin, the Famous Air Artist.

WITH a scream of wires a lone monoplane came diving through a swirl of cloud, a slender beautiful thing of stream-lined silver and blue-grey wings that blended with the night sky. The master hand on the control stick moved back a trifle, there came a flick of the quivering rudder, and up swung the oil-spattered nose, with those black, snarling engine cylinders grouped around the cowl like the spikes of some mammoth cactus.

Air Marshal Hugh Crichton, D.S.O., England's youthful Chief-of-Air-Staff, leant over the side of the cockpit, the propeller slip stream smashing against his leather-clad head as he studied the darkened countryside five thousand feet below.

He was a typical product of the Air Age, with his clever, alert face—those quick, bird-like movements of his well-poised head betraying the high nervous strain of tuning his brain continually to air speeds of two hundred miles an hour or more.

His steel-grey eyes, as keen as those of a hawk, were graven with countless tiny lines, a legacy from many hours of peering through the oil-smearred windcreens of hurtling aircraft.

"Tornado" Crichton, they called him in the Air Service, where his men worshipped him for his iron nerve and daring, admired him as a good fellow—this flying daredevil with the boyish face whom they felt was a good pal to them all.

He was smiling now as his eyes roved over the Kentish countryside hurtling beneath the spreading planes. He had all the Englishman's love of his country; and there was a rare beauty, which only an airman's eye could capture, in those swift-passing villages with their twinkling lights glowing through the dusk, the trim, green meadows and flowering hedgerows rolling like a verdant carpet away to the purple hills.

Suddenly his lips compressed as for a moment that peaceful scene faded and he seemed to see that fair garden of England hideous with the havoc of war, scarred with bomb craters—the creeping, grey mists of poison gas wreathing through the village streets—stumbling men clutching at their throats in choking agony.

Impatiently he shook his head.

"That could never happen to England," he breathed. "Our Air Defences are impregnable."

It was queer that his imagination, which, like all brilliant airmen, he had schooled himself to keep in iron check, should have brought that vague uneasiness stirring in his brain.

"Overstrain," he laughed, a little contemptuously. "You need a sound night's sleep, my lad."

He moved his long limbs a little wearily on the rudder bar as he sent the monoplane screaming into

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

a vertical bank that swung him in the direction of Harnborough.

For the last week he had been flying almost continuously through every conceivable kind of vile weather that had required something of the instincts of a homing pigeon to negotiate.

For the young Air Marshal had been inspecting Britain's Air Defences—those amazing underground coastal stations where, in bomb-and-gas-proof catacombs, mighty "iron craft" of the skies were leashed in readiness for that grim moment in the world's history when the new God of Air War spread his sinister wings.

And something more than rumours of air invasion had drifted from that crucible of war—Yellow Asia. Prince Sin Manfu, the mystery ruler of the Eastern Hemisphere, a mental giant who had linked the guile and fanaticism of the Orient with the science of the West, was said to be ready to fling his terrible brood of fighting aircraft into the skies. Not since Napoleon had Britain known so relentless an enemy as the yellow jingo, whose almond eyes were turned to the West, his lust for the kingship of the world blinding him to all humanity.



THE SPY SHOTS AT ENGLAND'S AIR MARSHAL.—"No you don't!" Quick as thought the white-faced youngster swung up his foot as the chink fired, and the gun went spinning from the ruffian's bruised fingers. The bullet that had been meant for England's Air Marshal went screaming harmlessly into the darkness.

The shrill note of the rotary engine died down to a rhythmic purr as the airman slid back the throttle lever. He was diving at terrific pace towards what seemed to be a mammoth white ribbon gleaming through the darkness. In reality it was the hundred-foot landing-platform above the underground G.H.Q. of Britain's Air Service, a vast length of steel supported on cantilever girders which cunningly disappeared beneath the ground when not in use. Now the landing platform was brilliant in the white concentrated barrage of searchlights.

Crichton yanked the rudder bar, and swung the control stick in the opposite direction, side-slipping skilfully to lose height with the minimum of forward progress.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

It was with dramatic suddenness that the grim tattoo of a machine-gun, spurting death from the darkness below, rose above the throb of the engine.

A bullet crashed through the cockpit wall, shattering the glass of the rev. counter. A starboard wire twanged like a bow string as a screaming bullet snicked it and then sliced its way through the wing fabric.

Tornado Crichton's jaw set. Quick as thought, he dived—rudder jammed hard to port, elevators flicking—and then he was spinning like a tumbler pigeon.

"Deuced good shooting," he breathed grimly. "Let's have a look at the blighter."

There came the snap of a switch—no easy matter to find on the ebony dashboard with that spinning machine slightly over the vertical, poisoning one's head and shoulders over a black abyss of space. Instantly a rocket-like object shot from the cylinder beneath the fuselage, and a small parachute attached to it opened with a whipping of silk. A vivid splash of brilliant light illuminated the blackness as the parachute flare floated slowly earthwards.

Flying at tremendous speed, Crichton circled that ring of light, his keen eyes searching for his mysterious attacker in the field lit by the un-canny glare. He had a shrewd suspicion as to what lay behind that audacious attempt to wing him. These were troublous times in England with Sin Manfu's spies everywhere. And what more likely person than the Chief-of-Air-Staff to be singled out for the murderous attentions of an enemy assassin?

Suddenly, Tornado Crichton stiffened. Two swaying figures staggered into the white arc of light, widening as the parachute flare was slowly sinking—a squat thick-set ruffian and a mere slip of a boy who was clinging to the big fellow's throat with the grit of an Irish terrier.

"Jingo, that youngster's got pluck!" he snapped. "But those odds aren't good enough."

He dived dizzily, stalled over a hedge, and perched the monoplane in the little field with a perfectly-judged tail-first landing. He was out of the cockpit like a fish, before the machine had stopped rolling, the light of battle in his eyes as he raced over the turf. The flare hit the ground, flamed for a moment, and then gave up the ghost like a guttering candle. Vaguely, in the gloom, Crichton could see the burly ruffian kneeling on the chest of the youngster he had sent crashing on to the turf. Up swung a massive, clenched fist which a moment later would have crashed brutally on to that white, boyish face.

But Tornado Crichton's flying brain was quicker than that of any landlubber.

Crash!

He landed fair and square on the crouching ruffian, a bunched mass of muscle and sinew that leapt on its target like a five-point-nine. That terrific jolt sent the big fellow slithering sideways, his guttural yell dying into a choking gasp as he flattened on the turf, Tornado Crichton's knees rammed into the small of his back. But with surprising agility for a heavy-weight he heaved himself free of the slim airman's grasp.

He was on his feet in a flash, the gun he had whipped from his pockets glinting in his hand.

"No, you don't."

The white-faced youngster, who still had some fight left in him, was on his feet now. Quick as thought he swung up his foot as the ruffian fired, and the gun went spinning from his bruised fingers, the bullet that had been meant for England's Air Marshal screaming harmlessly into the darkness.

"Good lad," Tornado Crichton said coolly.

He caught the assassin's wrist and spun him round, his eyes narrowing as he stared grimly down at the cringing yellow face with its high cheek-bones and sunken, small, black eyes.

"A Mongol," he muttered. "A hired assassin of Sin Manfu, I'll wager."

The man was silent, his face expressionless as a mask, his eyes betraying nothing with their unwavering fatalistic stare. Furtively, quickly, his hand moved across his mouth, and suddenly he swayed, a horrible defiant laugh breaking from his lips. He crumpled, his eyes closing as he fell; and then with a shudder he lay still, his ashen face lifted to the night sky.

Crichton bent over him, and he laughed grimly as he saw that queer stain on the man's lips, the fleck of foam at the corners of his sagging mouth.

"Prussic acid," he said shortly. "He was a spy alright—afraid to face the music."

Quickly he searched the man's clothing, but found nothing of importance, straightening as a boyish voice came to his ears.

"I caught him skulking beneath the trees, sir. When he started firing I thought I'd better get busy."

The Air Marshal glanced to where a miniature machine-gun lay on its side beneath the elms, its neatly-contrived telescopic tripod jutting into the air.

"Clever," he mused. "An unpleasant little toy that could be carried in an attache case, without anyone being the wiser."

He swung round and dropped his hand on to the boy's shoulder.

"You did me a valuable service," he said, gratefully. "That blighter nearly got me—"

He paused as he gazed down at the keen-faced, bright-eyed boy, who appeared about fourteen, conscious that there was something familiar about those fearless blue eyes, the firm mouth and chin that spoke of character and grit.

"What is your name, son?" he asked, curiously, and still his gaze intently studied the boy's good-looking face.

The lad lifted his fair head with a gesture of pride. "Dick Brittenham," he replied. "You knew my father, sir, Flight-Commander John Brittenham."

The bronzed hand on the boy's shoulder tightened, and for some moments Tornado Crichton looked away into the darkness, a queer huskiness in his throat. He was thinking of John Brittenham, the best pal he had ever known, thinking that it was a strange twist of fate that the boy who had done him such good service that night should prove to be Brittenham's son.

"Were you on your way to Headquarters to see me, Brittenham?" he asked, as suddenly an explanation of the boy's presence stirred in his mind.

"Yes, sir." The clean-limbed youngster stiffened smartly to attention. "You made a promise to my father that if"—there was the faintest quiver in his boyish voice—"if anything happened to him you would see that I was given a chance to become an airman in His Majesty's flying service. Dad's gone, sir. He can't help me now, and I'm alone in the world." So I've taken a chance and bunked from school. Anyway, I was due to leave at the end of term. I'm fourteen—over school age—"

He stopped a little breathlessly, his blue eyes vastly excited in his flushed face as eagerly they peered into the young Air Marshal's face—those strong, bronzed features he had recognised easily enough, for Tornado Crichton was a hero to every British boy.

With shrewd eyes, Crichton looked him over, this keen-faced, likeable youngster, who, if he had

inherited his father's born sense of airmanship, would go far in the flying services.

He would give the lad a chance, he decided, take him under his wing, so to speak, and instil him with the fascinating craft of the air, which every British boy would learn sooner or later in this flying age.

He would do that for John Brittenham's sake—the lion-hearted fellow who, on special Secret Service duty, had taken an appalling risk when under the cover of darkness he had been dropped by parachute on the outskirts of the secret city in Mongolia, where



IN ENGLAND'S HOUR OF PERIL.—"I am pleased to meet the son of John Brittenham," the Prime Minister of England said quietly. Dick flushed with pleasure as the veteran statesman held out his hand. "Your papers will not be delayed. From to-night you will bear the rank of Flight Cadet Brittenham."

Sin Manfu's mighty air-fleet was said to be mobilising.

And John Brittenham had never come back.

"I ought to pack you back to school, you young varmint," the Air Marshal snapped, but there was a twinkle in his eye. "But come along, I'll fly you back to Headquarters, and we'll see what can be done."

Dick Brittenham's heart was thudding absurdly against his ribs. Certainly it would have raced still faster had he known of the amazing, thrilling adventures which that strange meeting in the moonlit field was destined to bring.

"Th-thank you, sir." He spluttered, in his excitement. "You're a brick."

AND so it was that Dick Brittenham was given his air baptism. A little unsteadily, he adjusted the safety-belt around his waist as he crouched in the cockpit of the blue-grey monoplane. Then, with a roar like massed artillery, the four-hundred-horse-power rotary raced into life.

His heart missed a beat, and then went racing on again, as Tornado Crichton zoomed the mono. into the night, and the lad, sitting very rigid and straight behind the oil-flecked windscreens, saw the ground drop away at amazing pace.

But the dizzy speed, the roar of the propeller slip stream through the struts and wires as the speed gauge flickered to the two-hundred-miles-an-hour mark, seemed to find some answering echo in Dick Brittenham's blood. For the boy had the call of the air in his veins, as his father had had before him.

"Like to fly her, son?" roared the Air Marshal, above the thunder of the engine.

The boy's eyes were shining.

"Wouldn't I just," he breathed.

And then the control-stick was thrust into his hand, and Crichton was yelling the boy's first lesson in airmanship into his ear.

"Keep the engine cowling in line with the horizon," he told him, "and you'll know you're flying level."

Dick concentrated hard, his eyes goggling through the windscreen. But in his inexperienced hands the monoplane bucked and yawed like a temperamental racehorse. He kept her on a straight course for a minute or so, but he over-ruddered as she swung, and in a flash her nose whipped down into a nerve-racking spin.

"Straighten the rudder and centralise the control stick," came Crichton's cool orders, "and she'll straighten up."

Dick kept his head, though the blood was hammering at his temples with that dizzy two-hundred-mile-an-hour spin through space.

He yanked back the stick, and the nose quivered and slowly rose. And then a steady capable hand gripped his, and with practised skill, Crichton checked that hair-raising dive.

"Steady, son," he laughed. "If we went into the earth at this bat, reckon we'd come out at Australia."

There was approval in his voice. The lad had a cool head and steady nerves, he decided, and already he had displayed an air-sense that was highly creditable for one so young.

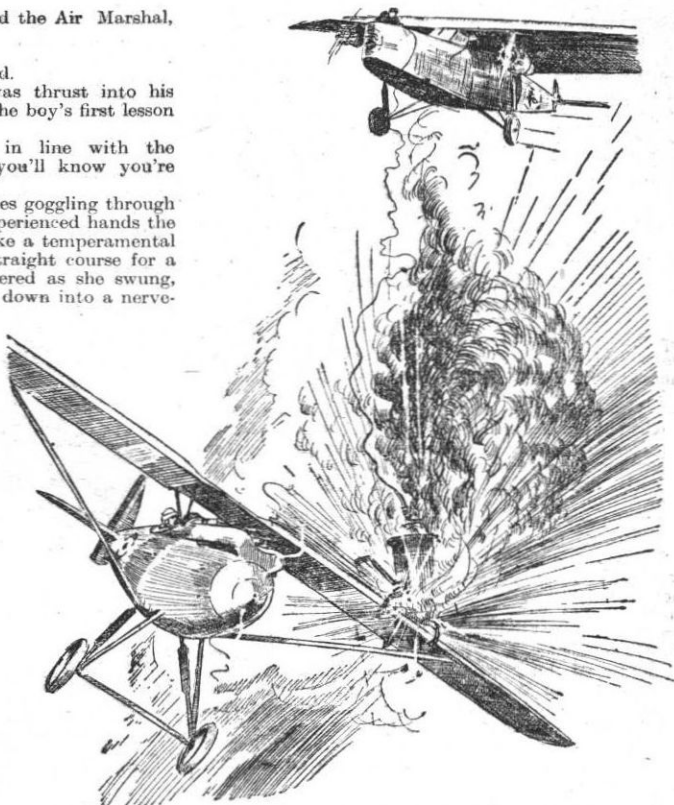
Crichton took over then, climbing steeply as he manoeuvred for his dive on the distant landing platform.

Dick watched the young airman with admiring eyes as skilful work with rudder and elevator dropped the blue-grey monoplane on to the immense platform of steel that seemed to rush up to meet the fragile machine. Dick clutched the padded seat, for it seemed that the mono. was crashing into that aerial pathway, brilliant with the blaze of concentrated searchlights. And then the gleaming nose rose smoothly, the machine dropped, and there came the twang of the flexible rubber cable that caught the undercarriage, and slowed the machine as the piled chains at either end evenly took up the strain.

It was all vastly exciting to Dick when, a few moments later, he walked proudly at the Air Marshal's side, to where a metal doorway in a revolving conning tower gave access to a spiral stairway. That entrance situated at the end of the landing-platform, led down to the vaultlike interior of the bomb-proof building that was the G.H.Q. of Great Britain's Air Service.

At the foot of the stairway Crichton led the way into a long steel-walled room, lit with the glow of mercury vapour lamps clustered in the ceiling—the room reserved for the Chief-of-Air-Staff.

Dick's attention was immediately attracted by a huge relief map of Britain resting on a table in the corner of the room—an ingenious, coloured, plaster model which represented the contour of hills, valleys



A TEARING SHELL TELLS ON "TORNADO'S" FIGHTING MACHINE.—Dick shrieked a warning as a roaring, stream-lined attacker dived at terrific speed out of the smoke. The boy cadet whipped his gaze upwards and saw a flaming ball shooting towards the 'plane. The shell crashed into the port side wing and flared like a giant torch.

and rivers, in fact every topographical detail. Above it stretched a network of wires on which movable model aeroplanes were suspended. By this means it was possible with the aid of wireless and telephone to detail the position of aerial fleets manoeuvring over Britain.

The Air Marshal stripped off his flying leathers. He was revealed now as a soldierly immaculate figure in blue uniform, with shining black field-boots. His tunic buttons, the wings on his left breast and his braided cuffs gleamed like gold.

He stretched his long limbs before a table and drew forward a printed pad.

"I must report to the Air Minister," he said. "That affair to-night must be investigated and a tender dispatched to bring in the body of that unfortunate spy."

He turned with a smile towards the flushed youngster, for whom he already felt a great liking.

"Then we'll discuss something more pleasant, Brittenham—your papers recommending you for a flight-cadetship. In the meantime I will fix you up with quarters here."

For some moments only the scraping of a pen, the quick breathing of the excited boy, broke the silence of the room.

Suddenly the door was flung open and an orderly

came quickly into the room. His heels clicked as he saluted smartly before handing a dispatch to the Air Marshal.

Tornado Crichton ripped open the envelope, and Dick, watching him, saw the muscles of his face grow tense, his lean, bronzed hand tighten over the slip of paper.

War—the Cabinet meets to-night.

Those words seemed to burn like letters of fire into the Air Marshal's brain. He stood motionless as a sphinx, yet something stirring in his eyes, some white-hot battle flame.

He knew what lay behind that curt official message. The menace of Sin Manfu had become a grim reality. Britain was on the threshold of the Great Air War and, thank heaven, Britain was prepared.

He lifted his head.

No man in England that night bore a more terrible responsibility than the young Air Marshal who would lead the might of Britain's Air Power into the most hideous battle of the world's history.

But his voice was as steady as a rock as he rapped out an order to the waiting flight sergeant.

"Wireless all stations to stand by. Britain is at war."

* * * * *

IT was an hour later when a sleek, grey, service car carried Air Marshal Hugh Crichton swiftly along Whitehall.

There was a strange hush in the streets, a silence breathless with a sense of impending disaster. Silent men were grouped on the pavements—as the dread rumour of war had brought the populace into the streets on that memorable August night in 1914. Now tense faces glanced up at the skies as if the menace of that mighty air fleet from the East already hovered over London.

But, beneath the grim unrest, a characteristic British calm prevailed amongst those who stood in the streets—streets that within a few hours might be an inferno of crashing high explosive and swirling poison gas.

Excited as he was, Dick Brittenham, sitting at the Air Marshal's side, was conscious of the intense drama in the air.

It had been Crichton's suggestion that the boy should accompany him to Downing Street that night.

"The Prime Minister can exercise his prerogative,"

Crichton had explained, "and grant you a flight-cadetship without delay. I want you to play your part in the Great Air War, Brittenham. Your father would have wished that, had he lived."

Crichton knew that young Britain would play a valuable part in the Great Air War. The trend of aeroplane design had made it customary to employ flight cadets in the big bombers—the dreadnoughts of the air—the fighting scouts of incredible flashing speed, the reconnaissance machines, with their batteries of high-speed cameras. For trim-built boy airmen could penetrate to the extremities of the tapering fuselages when minor repairs had to be carried out during flight—clamber through the network of wires to humour refractory engines, and even drop by parachute from high-speed aircraft if the urgency of their duties made it necessary for important dispatches to be delivered. And because there were many stout lads like Dick Brittenham, with the love of thrilling adventure in their blood, there had been no lack of recruits for this exciting new career for British boyhood.

The car swung up to the entrance of the Prime Minister's official residence, and the crowds in Downing Street pressed forward with a cheer as the popular young Air Marshal stepped on to the pavement.

There came a chorus of excited cries.

"Good luck, Crichton." "Blow the yellow devils out of the skies."

The door, closing behind them, shut out the clamour; and then the Air Marshal and his youthful companion were ushered into the oak-panelled room where history was being made that night.

The Prime Minister of England stood there, an iron-grey distinguished man, and with him were his Ministers, the Chiefs of the Army and Navy—minor actors in the new drama of war that was no longer to be played on land or sea.

"This is John Brittenham's son," said Crichton as he saw the Prime Minister's gaze go questioningly down to the flushed youngster at his side. "His father did great service for his country, sir—the greatest service, for he gave his life. May I ask you, sir, to appoint him to a flight-cadetship without delay, as I have special work for which I wish to detail him?"

(Continued on next page.)



OUR THRILLING DETECTIVE AND SCHOOL MYSTERY NUMBER NEXT WEEK.

Falcon Swift, the Sporting Detective and his Boy Assistant, Chick Conway, at Hallerton Coliere, a Great English Public School, engaged on the unravelling of a Strange and Menacing Mystery. What was the Deep Object of the Mysterious Science Master who Manufactured Mechanical Men? And what was the Meaning of the Strange Happenings at Dead of Night in the School? All these Problems the Monocled Manhunted sets Himself to Solve—with Startling Results. Don't Miss This Thrilling Extra-long Tale.

THE SCHOOLMASTER DETECTIVE

Appearing With Many Other Exciting Yarns in
BOYS' MAGAZINE NEXT SATURDAY.

THE WAR ON WINGS—

(Continued from previous page.)

Dick flushed with pleasure as the veteran statesman held out his hand.

"I am pleased to meet the son of John Brittenham," he said. "Your papers will not be delayed. We owe a great deal to your brave father's memory. From to-night you will bear the rank of Flight Cadet Brittenham."

Despite that solemn atmosphere, Dick nearly cut loose with a whoop of joy. He spluttered out his gratitude, and a kindly smile momentarily relaxed the stern face of the man who was great enough to extend a helping hand to an unknown youngster although his mind was torn with terrible anxiety.

He turned to the young Air Marshal.

"Sin Manfu's battleplanes are massing," he said tensely. "You are prepared, Crichton?"

A slow smile curved the young Air Chief's lips.

"Ready to hurl Sin Manfu and his hornets out of the skies, sir. You may rely on the Air Service. We shall not fail."

"We must not fail, Crichton."

For the first time, the Prime Minister's voice betrayed signs of strain. "We are fighting for the future of civilisation—for the white races of the world—"

He jerked into silence, his lips compressed, as suddenly he swung round towards the window. From the night came the quivering throb of massed machinery, and suddenly there was a tense silence in that room.

With a smile, Air Marshal Crichton strode to the window and ripped aside the curtains. High in the night sky could be seen a mighty spear-head formation of blue-grey aircraft flying at a terrific pace towards the east.

"Our advance guard," said Crichton quietly.

"I thought that London would wish to see that the Air Service is prepared."

* * * * *

THE grey light of dawn creeping into the eastern sky threw a ghostly radiance over the vast expanse of Harnborough Aerodrome, where blue-uniformed air mechanics worked with the tireless precision of steel robots.

There came a deep rumble of hydraulic machinery and, like mammoth monsters awakening from their sleep, a great line of underground hangars rose ponderously from the earth. As their towering doors drew level with the turf, they swung open and the great fighting machines came streaming out, the air quivering with the throb of mighty machinery as swiftly they manoeuvred into a score or more diamond formations.

"Gee—that's the stuff to give 'em!"

Dick Brittenham's eyes were shining as he watched that stirring scene, a trim workmanlike figure in his flying leathers, which to his regret covered his smart blue uniform of a flight cadet.

He was standing within the shadow of Air Marshal Crichton's flag machine, that he had been detailed to guard—an incredibly fast five-hundred-horse-power monoplane, so completely streamlined from propeller boss to rudders that it had the appearance of some monstrous bullet.

Dick would have given the world to be flying in that machine with the young Air Marshal, who was to lead the might of Britain's air power into the skies. The thought of going into battle with England's Air Fleet thrilled his imagination, set his pulses hammering.

"Jingo!" he muttered, his eyes roving towards the two-seater cockpit. "If Crichton won't take

me, hang it, I'll risk a court martial, and stow myself away in that jolly old fuselage."

Boom! Boom! Boom!

There came a deafening roar as the super-charged engines of the massed bombers got into their stride. Dick forgot everything then but the gripping wonder of the sight of those flying "Dreadnoughts" climbing into the skies.

It was a magnificent sight, the air-might of Britain massing for battle. The bombers rose majestically, in perfect diamond formation, the twenty-foot propellers whirling into circles of silver against the gunboat grey of the massive planes.

They bristled with machine-guns, jutting wickedly from the steel embrasures that converted the deep fuselages into flying forts. Guns of heavier calibre that fired small shells reared defiantly from the *empennage* gun turrets, looming above the nest of elevators and balanced rudders. Below, the fuselages were honeycombed, from the huge, pneumatic buffer undercarriages to the flexible tail-skids, with bomb-carrying tubes that could rain death and destruction.

It was a grim pageant of twentieth-century war, these dreadnoughts of the air, wheeling and manoeuvring with a thunder of engines that shook the very earth. Compared with these mighty powerful machines the fighting aircraft of the European War would have looked like mere toys.

Dick Brittenham's blood quickened in his veins as he stood staring up at the cruising air fleet, lit by the orange glow of the rising sun. His eyes were shining, his breath coming quickly between his parted lips.

"Hang it," he muttered, remembering how

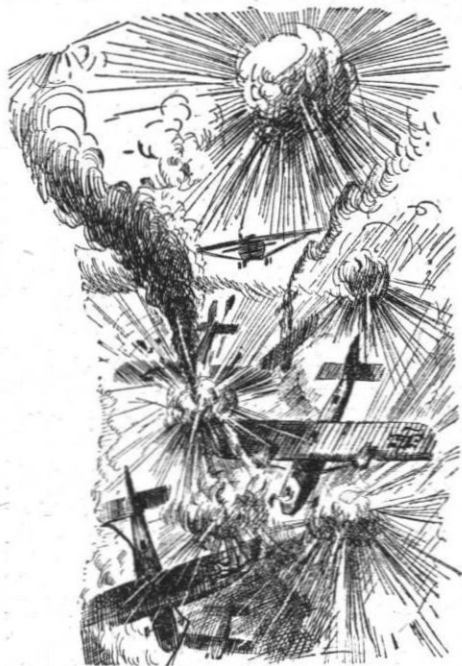


BRITISH 'PLANES FIGHTING LIKE FURY.—The heavens shook with the crash of guns. The air was filled with spinning, diving machines, and the Air Marshal and his boy cadet were in the thick of it, racking a hail of lead from the almost red-hot machine guns into the fear-stricken Chink pilots struggling madly to control crippled machines.

Air Marshal Crichton had shaken his head—reluctantly, if the truth were told—when he had begged him to let him fly in his Flag Machine that day. "I'm not going to miss the fun."

With a gleam of determination in his eyes he moved quickly towards the blue-grey monoplane, and disappeared beneath the port-side wing.

☞ Air Marshal Crichton, cool and debonair, came



THE CHINESE IN CHAOS.—The leading edge of the mass of enemy aircraft seemed to dissolve in flame and smoke. That green square of diving machines had become one mass of bleaching fire dripping through the sky.

striding across the turf leisurely drawing on his leather gauntlets. It was characteristic of the man that his lean bronzed face expressed no more emotion than if he were preparing to ascend for a before-breakfast joy ride.

The wireless corporal came hurrying to his side, saluted, and handed the Air Chief a radio message. "Good!" The Air Marshal's voice expressed satisfaction as he scanned the words on the official form. That message told him that the last Air Division was "up" cruising over its base, waiting for action orders. The aerial mobilisation had been completed with the smoothness of clockwork.

A few moments later he paused at the side of his machine, his gloved hand resting almost affectionately on its sleek body as he looked round for Dick Brittenham.

"Queer where the youngster's got to," he mused, a little disappointed in the lad, who it appeared had deserted his post. "I'll have to knock some discipline into the young cub. But maybe he has some good reason for clearing off."

He dropped between the bullet-proof walls of the stream-lined cockpit, tightened the straps of the

parachute pack between his shoulder blades, glanced at the flickering dials on the ebony dashboard.

Then the engine roared into life with a deep harmonious throb, and then Tornado Crichton was climbing in a dizzy spiral, climbing until he was a thousand feet above the cruising bombers of "Head-quarters" Flight.

He bent forward and snapped a calm order to his Flight Commanders into the high-powered wireless transmitting megaphone on the dashboard.

"Deploy in V Formation. Course, two degrees due East."

The mighty air adventure had begun.

THE stiff breeze that ten thousand feet below whipped the crests from the North Sea rollers, tore at the silken folds of the Royal Air Service Standard fluttering defiantly from the port-side strut of Air Marshal Crichton's flag machine.

According to plan, Tornado Crichton had left the bombers at the coast—flying fortresses cruising over the sea-bound frontiers to repel invasion.

Behind him now roared a glittering phalanx of fighting scouts, sleek, incredibly fast machines, with the pick of Britain's air "aces" in the stream-lined cockpits.

Tornado Crichton was combing the skies for Sin Manfu's advance guard, that had last been reported flying at a great height over the borders of Poland, heading due north.

Suddenly the Air Marshal whipped his powerful binoculars to his eyes, the control stick steadied between his knees.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "Here they come—hundreds of them!"

A strangely luminous greenish mass of enemy aircraft could be seen now, approaching at terrific pace in perfect "square" formation.

Down went the shining nose of the flag machine, then up it spun into a defiant loop. Tornado Crichton was skylarking for sheer joy, and he could no more have resisted that momentary expression of his feelings than a heavyweight who stretches his muscles at the clang of the gong.

But in a moment he was the cool quick-thinking air fighter again.

"Deploy for action."

The crisp command snapped into the wireless megaphone and almost instantly the fighting scouts were climbing and diving into a far-flung skyline of spearhead six-machine formations.

And now they were thundering across the sky like a hurtling mass of giant spears—aerial cavalry with weapons couched for the attack.

Tornado Crichton bent forward, one steady hand lightly on the controls, the other gripping the leather-bound handle controlling the line of machine-guns jutting from the bullet-proof nose—guns that were synchronised to send a hail of lead past the whirling blades of the propeller without ripping them.

"We'll ram the blighters if lead won't blow them out of the skies," he laughed grimly. His brain was working with flashlike rapidity as he climbed his phalanx of fighting scouts clean into the teeth of the approaching enemy. He knew the value of shock tactics—the advantage of the oldest axiom of war of getting "one's blow in first."

Shrewdly he guessed that Sin Manchu had flung that advance guard of fighters into the sky to "test" the extent of Britain's preparedness, to gauge something of her air power. Crichton knew that the morale value of hurling those invaders to destruction could not be over-estimated in this opening round of the mighty air war.

Suddenly the crouching Air Marshal started s,

violently that he realised the extent to which his nerves were tuned to fighting pitch.

For, amazingly, a voice had come from behind him, a boyish voice that quivered with excitement.

"Can I give you a hand, sir?"

For the first time since he had sighted that hostile formation high in the eastern sky, Tornado Crichton turned his steel-grey eyes away from the vast green square of approaching aircraft.

He was staring now with widened, incredulous eyes at the diminutive figure which a moment before had come wriggling through the small door in the bulkhead panel dividing the pilot's cockpit from the tapering fuselage.

It was Dick Brittenham who had slid from the cockpit, his freckled face almost as black as a nigger minstrel with the grease and oil that had plentifully bedaubed him in the flying hold.

The Air Marshal gasped.

"Shiver my struts!" he yelled. "A stowaway! You young varmint, I've a mind to drop you overboard and let you swim home."

Dick grinned a little weakly. That half-smile twitching the corners of Tornado Crichton's mouth had helped to reassure him.

"I couldn't help it, sir," he pleaded. "I didn't want to miss this beano."

"Beano!" roared Tornado Crichton. "Thunder, you're a true Brittenham. You've got pluck to butt into this trouble, but now you're here I'll have to let things rip. Get behind that machine-gun. You've got to make yourself useful—you young fire-eater."

He lapsed into silence as he jerked his gaze back to that ominous green square of snarling aircraft each moment drawing nearer. He wasn't angry with the lad. He admired his grit too much for that.

"Would have done the same thing myself when I was a young 'un," was his unspoken comment, for it wasn't so very long ago that Tornado Crichton had been a boy.

Dick, crouching behind the windscreen, his hand resting a little unsteadily on the trigger button of a machine-gun, watched that formidable array of invading aircraft with shining eyes, his heart pounding against his ribs. Never in his life before had he been so excited.

There was a tremor suddenly in the air as a thousand roaring engines thundered into their maximum revolutions.

The green phalanx of the invaders had seemed to tilt like some mammoth panel, and now the green host of fighters were thundering down in a mass-formation dive straight for the steady spearhead line of British aircraft.

"Keep air stations."

Grimly Tornado Crichton flung the command through the wireless megaphone. The blue-grey British fighters held their battle formation as steady as the Guards at Mons.

The air quivered with that thunderous inferno of sound, the roar of engines hurling the invaders into the attack at two hundred miles an hour, the deafening scream of wires like some defiant clamorous wavery of Sin Manfu's flying horde.

To the fighting British airmen, little more than boys most of them, tense and grim as they crouched behind the bullet-proof bulkheads, it seemed an eternity whilst they fretted for the order to let loose a stream of leaden death from the machine-guns.

Tornado Crichton's brain was working with flashlight rapidity behind his steel grey eyes. Not until he could rake that green square of thundering aircraft with a mighty salvo of screaming lead would he give the order to open fire. And even in the stress of that grim moment it came to him that



THE AIR MARSHAL'S SECRET SURVEY.—Tornado Crichton clutched Dick's arm and drew him back into the shadow of the high bulkheads. He stiffened as his gaze fell on that uplifted yellow face. "Prince Sin Manfu!" he breathed. "The invader from the skies."

through the ages the tactics of battle had not changed a great deal. He was waiting for his enemy with bristling guns as Nelson had waited for the Frenchies to grapple at Trafalgar.

Suddenly the air heaved with a prolonged thunderous crashing as the invaders opened fire. Spurts of flame and wreathing smoke burst from that mighty barrage of machine-guns and shell-vomiting weapons of higher power. That green square of diving machines had become one vast mass of belching fire, dropping through the sky.

The air rained with lead, crashing against the bullet-proof fuselages, slicing through wings and rudders.

The far flung line of British fighters quivered, but they kept perfect formation, although here and there a machine yawed horribly and then went spinning downwards to the sea, flames licking vertically upwards from its riddled tanks.

With a mighty effort of will Tornado Crichton hung on a moment longer. Then, as everything was obliterated by that hurtling curtain of death-belching fire:

"Let 'em have it."

It wasn't official language that the young Air Marshal roared into the wireless megaphone. He was too excited for that—just a primitive fighter, glorying in fierce odds.

The heavens shook with the crash of the British guns. That salvo of massed machine-guns tore that green square into ribbons as though it had been sundered by some giant hand. The leading edge of that mass of aircraft seemed to dissolve into flame and smoke. The formation broke as that deadly fire went on relentlessly. The air was filled with spinning, diving machines with jagged broken wings and torn propellers. And through the haze of smoke Dick Brittenham caught fleeting nightmare glimpses of Sin Manfu's swarthy fear-stricken pilots, struggling madly to control crippled machines.

It was a dog fight now, the British aircraft breaking formation challenging hostile machines to individual combat.

Tornado Crichton and Dick Brittenham were in the thick of it, looping, spinning and diving, racketing a hail of lead from the almost red-hot machine-guns into the scattering green aircraft whose enormous engine power was proved by their ability for swift flight.

Dick scarcely knew if he was on his head or his heels—he hardly realised anything except that white-hot excitement that fired his veins.

"Hot enough for you, son?"

Tornado Crichton laughed huskily as he brushed the perspiration from his eyes.

"Crums—look out, sir!"

Dick's reply was a shrill warning as a roaring stream-lined attack, glinting with that queer phosphorescent light that dazzled the eyes behind the machine-gun sight, dived at terrific pace out of the smoke. For once the Air Marshal's machine had been on an even keel. And so it was that for a vital second he was a "sitting target" for the enemy machine.

Dick caught a glimpse of a yellow, sinister face leering through the windscreen, and then Tornado

cylinder looked on to the wing—a cable trailing back to the enemy fighter.

"Thunder," he muttered hoarsely, "that tarnation thing will rip the wing to shreds!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Tornado Crichton sent a burst of lead hurtling up at the ugly green brute diving above him. It was one of the best shots of his life. The salvo ripped the rudders into a havoc of ribboned fabric. The enemy aircraft shivered, and then lurched into a death spin. And its very destruction brought disaster to the Air Marshal's fighter.

As the crippled green aircraft went hurtling past him, the cable of the grimly ingenious incendiary shell tattered.

There came a horrible ripping sound, and Crichton groined as he saw the grappling hooks tear the port-side wing to a jagged mockery of its former shapeliness, and the flaring contents of the shell fired the shattered woodwork as it ripped clear.

"That," jerked Dick grimly, "has put the lid on it."

The fighter quivered and then spun with Tornado

Crichton fighting grimly for control. But no skill of his could lift that plunging nose screaming downwards to the waters ten thousand feet below.

The Air Marshal whipped his safety belt free and straightened.

"We've got to jump, son," he said quietly. "With luck my parachute will hold us both."

Dick felt a strong lithe arm lift him from his seat, and then he was clinging to Tornado Crichton's shoulders, the wind tearing against his face.

"Over we go."

Crichton's voice snapped into silence as he flung himself clear of the spinning cockpit, the flames from the now fiercely burning wing hot against his cheek.

Then they were falling dizzily through space, the doomed fighter yawing past them with

a moan of wires.

Crichton required all his nerve to wait for those few seconds until the crashing machine had spun clear before he opened the parachute. He dared not endanger his one chance of safety.

He fumbled for the metal ring against his chest, fighting against the terrible dizziness of that horrible fall.

He jerked the ring, and the rip cord freed the tensioned rubber bands of the parachute pack strapped to his shoulders.

The pilot parachute whipped out first, drawing the larger mass of folded silk after it. There came the whipping of silk, and then, like a giant mushroom, the parachute opened.

The jerk on the harness almost threw the clinging boy from Crichton's grasp. He hung on grimly, gulping in deep breaths now that dizzy fall had been checked.

But with the combined weight on the parachute they were falling unpleasantly fast. The waters seemed to rush up to meet them, and then they hit the surface in a welter of foam.

Dick was wrenched from Tornado Crichton's aching arms with the force of that impact. He went



THE WAR LORD LANDS ON THE ISLE OF EXPLOSIONS.—

There came an ominous throb from the night sky, a scream of wires as the giant plane came diving down. A towering figure stepped out—a Chink with cruel eyes and massive, protruding jaw. The leader of the enemy air forces!

Crichton sent the monoplane screaming into a spinning fall.

A spurt of flame belched from the swivelling gun in the centre of the green fuselage hurtling overhead, a deep, booming sound that contrasted queerly with the shrill note of the machine-guns.

And as Dick whipped his gaze upwards he saw a flaming ball of fire shooting towards him. The uncanny light from that flaring fire-shell lit the tense faces of the man and the boy crouching in the cockpit. And then, with a crash that set every wire and strut quivering, the shell crashed into the portside wing, slithered horribly over the doped fabric and then stopped as the cunning grappling hooks curving from its metal cylinder clawed into the plane.

Famed by the slip stream, the incendiary flared like a giant torch, and there came the grim crackle of flaming fabric.

IT was not until that yellow sulphuric smoke had partially cleared that the Air Marshal and his boy-companion realised the real sinister nature of the missile that had been launched against them.

Dick's lips tightened as suddenly he saw that a long, whipping cable was attached to that flaring

under, his whole body tingling as if it had been seared with red-hot needles.

But for all the pain of that fall, the cool water revived his flagging senses. He kicked his way to the surface, and to his relief saw Crichton treading water some few yards away.

"All right, old son!" yelled the Air Marshal, with his usual cheery grin.

Dick brushed the salt from his eyes.

"Right as a trivet," he grinned. "Looks as if the Navy will have the laugh of the Air Service, sir. We'll have to rely on the senior service to get us out of this."

But at the moment Tornado Crichton was not worrying about rescue. He was grinning trium-

DICK BRITTENHAM opened his eyes and looked around him through the mists of dispersing unconsciousness. Where was he? What had happened? As slowly memory returned he sprang to his feet, anxiety gripping at his heart. And in that moment, when he stared round at the queer, rugged place where he had awakened, he forgot to marvel at this seeming miracle that had thrown him from the seas on to some strange land.

He was torn with anxiety for the safety of Air Marshal Crichton. How had he fared in that grim upheaval of nature which had brought so mystifying a climax to the parachute thrill.

Suddenly he let out a joyous whoop as a tall, unmistakable figure came stumbling through the darkness.

"Sir!" he yelled as he ran forward. "Thank heaven you're all right."

The Air Marshal gripped the boy's hands, an expression of relief on his strained features.

"Mighty queer business this, Brittenham," he jerked, looking around him with bewildered eyes.

"There can only be one explanation. It is not, as I thought, some new form of terror conceived by the wily Sin Manfu. We've been involved in one of those inexplicable volcanic upheavals that get the scientists guessing. An island has been thrown up in the sea, and we just happened to drop into the trouble."

Dick gasped as he let the significance of the Air Marshal's words sink into his whirling brain.

"We were mighty lucky," he said at last. "The waters must have left us marooned when they subsided, or we'd be in Davy Jones's locker by now."

Tornado Crichton's professional instincts were working.

"Don't you realise, Brittenham," he said, excitedly, "what this can mean? We'll plant a Union Jack on this jolly old island, and we've got an air-base plump in the middle of the North Sea that it would have been impossible to build. I reckon we could build landing grounds and aircraft nests here—"

He broke off, drawing an electric torch from his water-soaked tunic, and to his satisfaction he found that it was still serviceable.

The finger of light roved round that queer barren expanse of grey rock, and suddenly an amazing, uncanny thing happened.

As the light beams rested on a molten silverlike substance, that appeared to have bubbled from the fissures in the rock, a brilliant dazzling ray leapt from that mysterious ore.

That shaft of light impinged on a boulder, and there came a thunderous roar, a flash of vivid purple light, and the rock exploded into flying fragments, as if it had been pulverised by dynamite.

The man and the boy started back, their eyes wide and staring. For a moment neither spoke, for they were struggling with a grim sense of unreality.

Then, unsteadily, Tornado Crichton switched off the torch.

"By heaven!" he muttered. "Unless I'm mighty mistaken, fate has placed a deadly weapon in our hands to crush the air-power of Sin Manfu."

He grasped Dick's arm, his eyes blazing.

"Think, boy, what it can mean if we can produce death-rays from that silver ore which will destroy aircraft as they shattered that boulder—"

Even as he spoke there came an ominous throb from the night sky, a scream of wires as an aeroplane came diving down on to the volcanic island.

Tornado Crichton clutched Dick Brittenham's arm and drew him back into the shadow of the high boulders.

(Continued on page 23.)

THE BOY "BIRDMAN"—

Dick Brittenham,
chum of the Air
Marshal of Eng-
land, who looms
large in this stir-
ring story.



phantly up at the skies, where, like a flock of scurrying vultures in the western sky, Sin Manfu's advance guard were retreating as fast as engine-power could carry them, with the British fighters swirling around their tails.

"We've taught that swollen headed Celestial a lesson," he laughed grimly, as faintly the rumble of machine-gun fire drifted from the distant sky. "But it's only the beginning, Brittenham—a mere skirmish compared with what is to come."

Dick did not reply. He was staring across the waters, not towards the sleek grey destroyer that a wireless S.O.S. from one of Crichton's flight commanders had already brought racing over the horizon. He was gazing with narrowed eyes at a heaving surge of water which suddenly had leapt into a growing mighty wave that was leaping towards them.

That was all the warning they had of the amazing thing that happened. Suddenly the waters around them boiled up like the contents of some seething cauldron.

Even as Dick let loose a warning yell, with some vague idea of preparing Tornado Crichton for this new danger that was terrifying in its suddenness, the tidal wave crashed down on them.

Dick never remembered clearly what happened after that. He found himself struggling in a great green wall of water that battered the breath from his lungs. Choking for breath, he went slithering down that massive wall of roaring sea and foam, seeming to drop into a sucking maelstrom that dragged him relentlessly into the bowels of the sea.

With sheer will-power he clung to his reeling senses, a mist gathering before his eyes, a deafening roar of rushing waters thundering in his ears.

Then, as if some giant hand had lifted him, he was flung upwards, went crashing down again on to something that jolted every bone in his body. Suddenly the tumult had died, and there was a strange hush over everything. Dick Brittenham stirred, the blood throbbing at his temples like the beat of trip hammers, and then he remembered no more.

YOUR EDITOR'S PAGE.

Special Thrill Detective Number Next Week,
Chaps.

DON'T MISS

THE SCHOOLMASTER DETECTIVE

AND ALSO

THE FOOTBALLER WHO CAME BACK

INTRODUCING

MARK FORWARD, THE FOOTBALL DETECTIVE.



MY DEAR CHUMS,

Isn't it all that I told you it would be? I mean, of course, our magnificent new yarn of the peril that might come from the skies.

The scare is there! Our Secret Service, and our high officials at Whitehall—all the deep thinkers and statesmen of our time—know that it must come. We hope that the menace that will fill the dark heavens in a vast holocaust of flames—the descent of invading hordes of super fighting air-craft—will be delayed (if fulfilment many years yet.

But we must be prepared. In the far-flung East there are hushed preparations. It may be a hundred years before the great air war comes, it may be to-morrow. Therefore, I want you to read this yarn. It is a remarkable, vivid and forceful forecast of war as it will be when we all live in the skies.

Next week's long chapters will take your breath away with their vivid realism. Tornado Crichton, the Marvel Man of the Skies, and his boy chum are up to great stunts. You will do your old editor a favour by telling all your chums about this top-hole tale of the war that will take place three miles high above sea and land, when the heroism, pluck and resource of men—aye, and boys too!—will be taxed as they have never yet been in this age of science and invention and high-tension living.

And, chums, next week's is to be a Special Thrill Number. I have a gripping, eerie and mysterious story of Falcon Swift, detective, to present to you; an extra long yarn that will keep you gasping.

The Monocled Manhunter, with his boy assistant, Chick Conway, go to a public school to clear up an astonishing case. They go through perils unheard of, and yet are baffled at every turn. It is an amazing case of a strange scientist-master crook at a public school. You simply must read the tale. It is entitled:

THE SCHOOLMASTER DETECTIVE.

Falcon Swift combines the rôles of schoolmaster and sleuth. It all starts in the strangest fashion. Chick, in disguise as a newsboy, rescues a mysterious youth from the watery death clutch of the Thames.

JOKE COUPON.

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

Boys' Magazine

1/10/27.

And he and Falcon Swift discover that the boy is the son and heir of a certain high personage. The boy, mark you, was found in ragged clothing wandering the streets of London, when he should by rights have been safe and sound at a certain famous public school. From there the story goes

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.

on, and startling, amazing developments occur that take the Monocled Manhunter and his boy assistant to Hallerton College.

And, chaps, the Mag.'s Special Winter Football Season opens next week, when I shall have something to tell you about the

FREE FOOTBALL GIFTS

that are coming your way. Next week you are to meet again Mark Forward, the austere mystery man and football detective, with Raggles, the precocious kid who assists him in all his cases. Mark Forward is faced with one of the most baffling mysteries it has ever been his lot to undertake. It is the case of

THE FOOTBALLER WHO CAME BACK.

Supposed to be dead, he comes back from the grave to haunt and confound the mysterious "Council of Thirteen" who plotted against him. Ah, I mustn't tell you too much, must I? This great yarn will soon be in your hands, chaps—the first of a series of football thrillers that will grow in their intense interest week by week.

DICK OF THE WATERWAYS.

What did you think of the above fellow? He, too, will be appearing again next week, in a tremendous tale of an explorer in South America who has discovered too much. He is dogged and followed back to England by—well, that's enough. Just read how "Dick of the Waterways" takes a hand in the matter.

And there is also coming another thrilling and amusing yarn of

THE KID PIRATES.

You remember Llewellyn Barker and his gang of boy pirates? They're up to snuff in a new exploit next week. So look out for a capital number of the good old Mag.

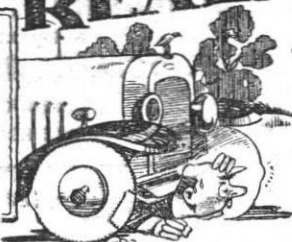
Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

The JESTER'S REALM

Yokel (to motorist whose car has broken down): Don't be afraid, zur—the cow won't bite.

(Will sender forward name and address?)



WHAT O, BOYS!
Send in your joke to the
Joke Ed., B.M. 140,
Fetter Lane
LONDON, E.C.4



A SURPRISE FOR BOTH.

"Hallo, old man!" exclaimed Dumbley at the literary circle reception. "It's a pleasant surprise to meet you here!"

"Good of you to say so, old chap," replied Brown.

"Yes, I was afraid I wouldn't find anybody but briny and cultured people here!"

(Fountain pen to F. ALLIS, 8, Hazelhurst Road, Tooting, S.W.17.)

NOTHING DOING!

A little girl had been watching an artist, in a picture gallery, copying a famous and very valuable picture.

"If you please, sir," she said, somewhat timidly, "will you give me the old one, when you've done with it?"

(Fountain pen to CYRIL CHICHESTER, "Burnham House," Brent Street, Hendon, N.W.4.)

NEW USE FOR FIZZ.

MAID: Them bottles with the squirts is fine, Mum.

MISTRESS: Why?

MAID: Why, I've done all the kitchen floor, an' there's still two left out of the dozen.

(Fountain pen to J. PELLIPS, 6, Heath Terrace, Ynysfyr, Rhondda, Glam.)

JUST TOMMY.

TEACHER (to Tommy): Tell your mother the next time she patches your trousers not to patch coloured pieces of cloth on them. Look at that one there.

TOMMY: Where? that one? That ain't a patch; that's meself!—T.E. (Bellingham).

MATHEMATICS.

JUDGE: Accused, you are sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment. Have you anything to add?

"No. But I should very much like to subtract a bit."

(Fountain pen to E. P. WHITEFIELD, "Ferndale," Berry Nabbor, North Devon.)



Sarcastic Old Golfer: Do you think it's safe to wear knickerbockers, young man?

Spindly-shanked Youth (surprised): Why not?

S.O.G.: You might be arrested for having no visible means of support!—Football to Master Chris. Owen, Tower Buildings, Bangor-road, Conway, North Wales.

WOW! WOW!

"Your Honour," said a policeman, "your bull pup do went and chawed up the Court Bible."

"Well," grumbled the judge, "make the witness kiss the pup. We can't adjourn the Court to get a new bible!"

(Fountain pen to — 21, Spencer Place, Roundhay Road, Leeds.)

PHEW! WHAT A HUM!

PA: Hey, Percy, go and get some eggs for breakfast.

PERCY: All right, Pa.

[Percy goes, and soon returns.]

PA: What! you've got them so soon, Son?

PERCY: Yes, Pa; the shop was shut, so I got them from the Museum.

(Fountain pen to ERIC HAINES, 21, Chestnut Grove, Chesterton Road, Cambridge.)

PAT APOLOGISES.

Pat was visiting a friend's house. The friend was the proud owner of a talking parrot. Pat had never seen a parrot before.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the bird, as the visitor walked past the cage.

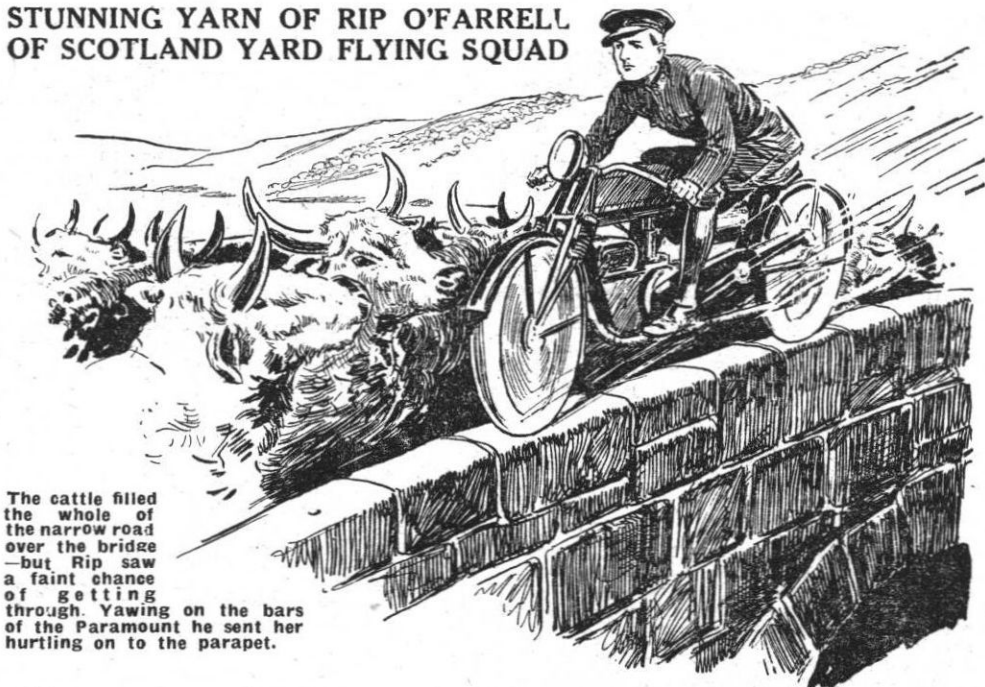
Pat turned in amazement, and, after staring at the parrot for a moment, raised his cap in salute.

"Good morning to yez," he said politely. "Sure, an' at first I thought yez was a bur-rd!"

(Fountain pen to R. SARGENT, 51, Rodford Road, Golders Green, N.W.11.)

FOOTBALLS and FOUNTAIN PENS awarded to senders of all jokes printed on this page. Send in your favourite joke on a postcard to: Joke Editor, "Boys' Magazine," 146, Fetterlane, London, E.C.4. Coupon on Page 13 must accompany every joke submitted.

STUNNING YARN OF RIP O'FARRELL OF SCOTLAND YARD FLYING SQUAD



The cattle filled the whole of the narrow road over the bridge—but Rip saw a faint chance of getting through. Yawing on the bars of the Paramount he sent her hurtling on to the parapet.

THE SPEED POLICEMAN'S PERIL CASE

RIP O'FARRELL—recently elevated to the Flying Squad—hummed a gay little tune to the accompaniment of the regular *purr* of his Paramount Super-eight mo' bike.

He was heading north on a perfect July day—and with all of that perfect day before him—for the Dayntree Races. He had been detailed for special duty at the meeting which was due to start on the morrow.

A gang of racecourse crooks had been active recently, hence the presence of the motor-cycling policeman.

Rip's mo' bike never seemed to have gone better and he congratulated himself upon the little job of decarbonising and the tuning up of the speedy engine which he had carried out the day before in preparation for this trip.

Yet even so, before he came to the outskirts of the old-world town of Dayntree he found his bike skidding and bumping on the dangerous road.

In addition to its narrowness, the surface was bad and loose—a moment's relaxation and one might easily go crashing over the low drystone dike and down into "The Devil's Punch Bowl." Rip was quite relieved when he had rounded the turn, and saw the famous Dayntree course stretching out before him.

Having reported to the Chief Constable, Rip garaged his bike. His uniform was sufficient to get him past all turnstiles and barriers. The time passed pleasantly enough, but of the gang he was after, Rip found no trace.

Then the racing started.

The first two races were over—now there was only one before the big steeplechase of the day. Rip felt himself looking forward to it, and wondering whether Index II, the popular favourite, would justify the confidence the public was placing in him.

One of the ring-keepers beckoned to Rip.

"The Boss wants you—you'll find him back of the Grandstand!" he said.

"The Boss," Rip knew, meant the Chief Constable, and so he hurried off to find that official.

"Ah, O'Farrell," remarked the Chief, when Rip came to a halt before him and saluted smartly. "I want you to run this note back to the station for me. It's not frightfully important, but I'd like it to go off by Registered Post with the other station documents to the Yard."

Rip nodded, took the envelope handed to him, and then dragging out the Super-eight, drove his foot down upon the kick-starter which sent the engine roaring into life.

Away he zoomed in the direction of Dayntree town, deciding to take the upper road—since it was shorter—and thus to be back in time for the big race.

The station reached, and the envelope handed over in return for a receipt, Rip started off back again—taking the higher road once more.

Soon he reached the treacherous "Devil's Elbow," and as he swung round the bend—doing a comfortable forty m.p.h.—he suddenly let out a startled cry, and stamped hard upon the foot brake.

Coming straight for him was a horse galloping at a mad speed and perilously near the edge of the Punch Bowl. And—sure evidence of foul play—the animal was blindfolded by a sack tied securely over its head!

Worse still, the body of a man was roped to its back, facing the tail.

In a flash Rip swung his mo' bike round in a short arc so that he, too, was facing in the same direction as that in which the horse was madly galloping.

His engine between his knees was still purring sweetly and he heeled the machine in close to the edge of the road.

The next instant the horse careered past him, snorting heavily inside the sack, only by some supreme instinct keeping on the road!

Rip slipped in bottom gear and then shot off with a jerk after the horse with its amazing mount.

Now he was abreast of the animal and sought for the bridle—but this had been lunched up inside the sack.

The stirrups were, however, flying wide each side of the frightened beast and Rip made a frantic snatch at one of them, closing his fingers like a vice about the cool metal.

Then, with one hand trying to keep the bike straight, he endeavoured his utmost to bring the horse up.

But so terrified was the brute by the sack over its head that Rip felt his machine skidding and slithering in imminent danger of going over the edge.

Shutting off the juice, he allowed the bike to slump over on its side into the road, as he was dragged from the saddle—still gripping the stirrup.

Rip was whisked off his feet, and they flew out over the low stone wall separating the narrow road from the three-hundred feet drop.

Then they grounded again, and Rip dug his heels into the road ahead of him, like some cowboy "bull-dogging" a steer.

Murmuring quietening words to the horse, he managed at last to bring the animal to a standstill, and then with his free hand he ripped off the sack from the beast's head. He turned his attention to the man bound to its back like some modern Mazeppa and his sharp jack-knife cut through the cords. A moment later he had dragged the small-built man from his uncomfortable position.

Then, as he gazed into the other's white and frightened face: "Steve Antony!" he exclaimed, voicing the name of the leading cross-country jockey of the day.

"Yes—you're right!" muttered the little man, "and," he jerked his thumb towards the horse, "that's Index II!"

Rip gasped his astonishment and glanced at his wrist-watch. It was already five minutes to three—the big race was due to be "off" at three o'clock precisely.

"Can we do it?" he cried. Can we get him there in time?"

"Not a hope!" returned Steve Antony. "There'll be no Index II in to-day's big race. But what's worrying me, who's riding Colour Scheme?"

"That was to have been your mount?"

"Yes," nodded the jockey, "but I'm forgetting to thank you—you saved my life. But for you I'd be at the bottom of that with Index II and that cursed gang would have succeeded in what the blighters set out to do."

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed Rip, brushing aside the man's thanks, for now he was beginning to realise that he had fallen right into the middle of a big plot—one for which the gang he was after were probably responsible.

Then little Steve Antony proceeded to explain.

"Did you know that Dayntree Towers was broken into last night, and Lady Dayntree's diamond necklace stolen?" he asked. "No, I thought perhaps you might not," he went on, as Rip shook his head. "It's being kept quiet, I believe, to kid the thieves that the loss is not discovered yet—but every road out of Dayntree is being guarded and no car is allowed out without being searched. That's how I came to be there," he jerked his head towards Index II now peaceably nibbling at some grass growing at the side of the road.

"I got a scare message—supposed to have come from my wife that our kid was ill," went on the jockey, "but on the way, late last night, I was scooped up by a dozen men it seemed and tiffed on the head.

"The same gang somehow got hold of Index II out of his stables, and—well—you can guess the rest.

"I was tied on his back—as you found me—and then they popped a sack over the fine beast's head and drove him on to this road with a whip. Phew! I don't know how he managed to avoid going over there!"

"But what's the idea?" exclaimed Rip, eager for information.

"Simple enough—they didn't want the favourite to win—and he certainly won't."

"Yes—but what was the idea of collaring you? You weren't even engaged to ride him."

Steve shrugged his shoulders.

"Search me!" he answered. "We may find that out when we get back to the course. Can you give me a lift on the back of your machine?"

Rip nodded.

"What about the horse?" he asked.

"There's a blacksmith's forge a few yards round the corner," replied Steve, and then Rip remembered having seen it earlier in the day. "We'll leave him there—he'll be safe enough—I know the smith."

And so Index II, instead of facing the tapes for the big steeplechase race, spent the time in a loose box in the blacksmith's place—perhaps to the horse's satisfaction, who can tell?

A Desperate Chase.

THE Paramount Super-eight whizzed, Rip and the jockey to the starting-point of the famous race just as the tapes flew up for the "off."

From their position on a raised portion of the road above the course, they could see everything perfectly.

"Crumbs!" ejaculated the jockey as he picked out the white and crimson hoops and red cap which he should have been wearing on Colour Scheme. "That's one of the blighters who nabbed me last night on my mount! What's the idea—gunna 'pull' him, I 'spose."

"Well, we'll be at the finishing post to tackle him at the end of the race," cried Rip. "He'll get a bit of a shock when he finds you there."

"Aye! I'll 'shock' him!" grated Steve Antony as he clenched his muscular little hands.

Together they slowly descended the rise—Steve still on the pillion seat—when suddenly the jockey gave vent to a cry of amazement.

"Look!" he cried. "The blighter's run out from the fences! He's jumping the rails and making for the open country. I'm beginning to understand now. . . ."

And Rip, as he watched, began to understand, too. "Slip off, son," he yelled to the jockey. "I'm going after him. I can cut him off with this machine—but I don't want your extra weight!"

The jockey understood and reluctantly slipped from the pillion seat without Rip even slowing up for him to do so.

He landed in a heap in the road, but with a laugh

and a cry that he was "All right!" bade Rip "go to it."

And "go to it" Rip certainly did.

Opening wide the throttle, he fairly roared down the incline.

At the bottom were fork roads.

One led straight for the grand stands, whilst the other shot off and made across the heath upon which the course was situated.

Rip chose the second one. He judged that it would take him along in the same direction as that for which Colour Scheme was now being headed.

Head down, lips compressed and jaw set, Rip hared along, 'midst a cloud of dust and with small stones being shot up from his back wheel.

He had timed things well! He would, he realised, gain a spot on the road—across which the horse and rider must pass—before either of the latter could reach it.

Now he slowed down.

He wanted it possible to so synchronise his arrival that he would be able to run the machine just ahead of the horse and bring him to a standstill.

Rip felt at his waist and loosed the flap of his holster in which reposed a "point four-five" automatic pistol.

He might need that he realised—for the rider!

The Paramount shot forward—dead in the path of Colour Scheme and its mysterious jockey.

The rider was taken unawares, for a clump of furze had hidden Rip and his machine from view until that instant, and he had no time to jerk the horse aside.

But the fellow—scoundrel though he might be—was a born horseman. Driving his heels into the horse's flanks he brought his whip down upon its hind quarters, and the fine animal realised what was expected of it.

Taking off perfectly, it rose in the air, and leaped clean over both Rip and his machine!

It was a wonderful jump! But in landing, Colour Scheme "pecked" badly. The rider did his best to pull him up, but the next instant he went flying over the animal's ears to land in a heap with the horse on top of him.

For a moment both man and horse were one writhing heap, and Rip was swinging his leg clear to throw himself upon the unknown horseman, when Colour Scheme lashed out with a hind leg in struggling to regain his feet, and struck the fellow upon the temple.

A short, stifled moan and he lay limp and silent upon the turf.

The horse, on its feet once more, gave one look at its thrown rider, and then with a snort set off at a gallop across the heath in the direction of a house nestling amongst the trees—its stable.

Now Rip was on his feet, and waiting but a moment to yank the machine up on to its stand, he hurried forward and dropped on one knee beside the unconscious jockey.

The fellow was completely "out"—though his heart still beat.

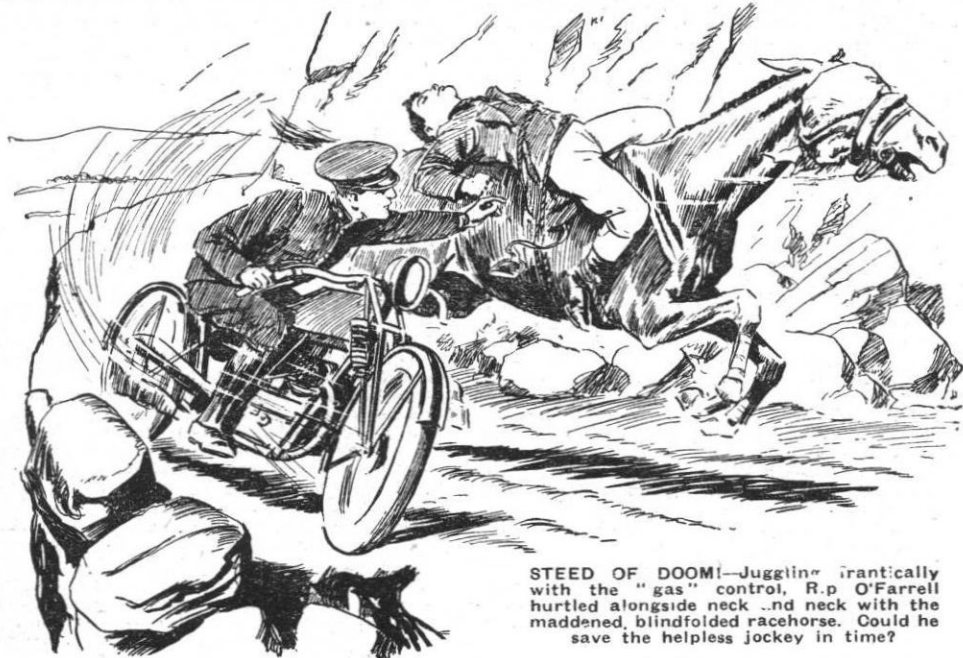
Already Rip had formed a theory as to why the man had deliberately run Colour Scheme out of its course and made for the open country—the Daytree diamonds!

Now Rip ran his fingers quickly over the other's body in search of some wallet which might contain the stolen necklace.

The fellow was sparsely clad in silk shirt and white pigskin breeches, but no trace of any necklace could Rip find.

"The horse!" he cried a moment later. The animal had now reached the open door of the stables and was trotting meekly through the large gates which were slammed to a moment later.

Whipping off his belt the Flying Squad man strapped the jockey's elbows tightly behind his back,



STEED OF DOOM!—Juggler frantically with the "gas" control, R.p. O'Farrell hurtled alongside neck and neck with the maddened, blindfolded racehorse. Could he save the helpless jockey in time?

and with a length of copper wire from the tool-kit of his mo' bike, bound his ankles together.

"You'll be safe there for a bit, my beauty," he murmured. "I'll come back and see to you later—but meanwhile the diamonds."

Back into the saddle of his machine, Rip sped forth making for the stables amongst the trees.

Soon he reached the outer wall running right round them.

His bike propped up against the wall sufficed as a "ladder" up which to climb so that he could reach the broken glass on the top of the wall.

His gauntlet driving gloves saved his hands as he broke some pieces out of the mortar which held them to get a grip. Then with a final kick, he managed to drag himself up and sat astride the wall.

Inside the stable yard all was ominously quiet. Everyone—even down to the youngest stable lad, was at the races, of course.

Swinging his other leg over, Rip dropped down into the courtyard of the stables, and then dragging out his heavy automatic he went quickly forward.

Not a sound came to his ears—the place seemed entirely deserted.

"What luck," he breathed to himself, "if I find the diamonds amongst the weights in the saddle bags."

Turning in at the first door he came to, he saw Colour Scheme, now contentedly munching at some hay in its manger.

The saddle, however, had been dragged round to one side, and Rip gave vent to a cry of disappointment as he saw a great knife-slash in the leather bags in which were carried the weights with which the horse was handicapped.

These had dropped out on to the straw-covered floor.

Whatever had been amongst them was gone!

Rip set off quickly forward, gripping his gun, and made for the house itself.

Someone must be here—or at any rate someone had been there when the horse trotted in. This was evidenced by the slamming of the gates, and the slashed saddle.

Then suddenly there came to his straining ears the sound of a high-powered motor-engine suddenly starting up, and throwing discretion to the winds, Rip raced through the house which adjoined the stables.

The front door was open, and through it he saw a low-pitched racing car with four men crowded into it, just swinging down the drive and out through the wrought-iron gates.

Rip gave a cry of chagrin as he saw his quarry go.

"But there's still the old mo' bike!" he breathed.

"Guess that'll overtake any darned racing car!"

In a flash Rip was out through the gates, and running round the outer wall was soon back to the spot where he had left his machine standing.

A kick and the engine was roaring.

Running it forward, Rip leaped into the saddle, and crouching down set off to overtake the car.

But the four-seater had a good start. Rip could see it already half-a-mile ahead and going like the wind towards a narrow bridge spanning a river.

On the further side was a field in which browsed a herd of fine pedigree bulls, Rip noted, but he paid little attention to them—it was the car he was after—yet before long those bulls were going to play an important part in the chase.

Now the car had reached the bridge—so narrow that only one car could pass over it at a time between the equally narrow stone parapet on either side.

But Rip was gaining on the car, and had drawn near enough to use his gun.

Out came his automatic

Crack! A bullet hissed through the air to miss its mark and plough its way through the windscreen of the car.

But in firing that shot Rip made a fatal error.

Up to that moment the crooks in the racer had no idea that they were being followed, but as the glass of the windscreen splintered into a thousand fragments, the occupants gave a cry of alarm, and zagged back along the road, while the car began to slow down.

For a moment Rip chuckled as he thought he had perhaps plugged one of the tyres.

But the next instant he gave a gasp of horror as he saw the reason for the stop.

Two of the men had sprung out of the car, whilst two others leaning over the back had opened fire with revolvers back along the road—the bullets ploughing up the dust on the centre of the bridge.

The two out of the car were making for the gate of the field in which were the pedigree bulls. They wrenched it open and began scaring the bulls out of the field.

Now they had the whole bunch—some thirty or more of them—on the road; and then, drawing their guns, they sent bullets spluttering in the wake of the maddened brutes.

A regular stampede ensued.

Terrified by the sound of the firing, and the bullets whizzing about their heads, the cattle burst into a mad gallop—straight for the narrow bridge.

And Rip hardly realised what had happened until he saw the leaders breasting the hump, their heads lowered, and their great horns showing wickedly in the sunlight.

And he was on the bridge!

There was but one chance, and quickly he made his decision.

It seemed like suicide almost, but death was certain if he kept on in the centre of the road.

The narrow stone parapets on either side of the bridge did not terminate abruptly as is usual, but ran down in sloping fashion to the edge of the road itself.

Risking everything to his good driving and judgment, Rip wrenched the handlebars round and made for one of the parapets.

The next instant the front wheel had passed up on to the narrow stonewall.

It wobbled perilously for a split-second, and then Rip righted it as the back wheel bit on the stonewall. He grimly steered across the narrow parapet—hardly a foot wide.

Now he was at the centre—the apex of the hump—and starting to speed down the further side.

It looked as if he might do it!

The men from the car, seeing Rip's desperate move, sprang back for the safety of the car, which shot forth with a jerk an instant later.

Rip was forced to go slow along that narrow parapet, but at length he reached the haven of the broad road again with a cry of exultation.

But the car was away again—some five hundred yards ahead of him.

Rip smiled grimly—he was beginning to enjoy himself now that that perilous crossing of the bridge was over, and he sternly settled down to ride—as he had never done before.

Steadily he decreased the distance between him and the car ahead, lying low over the handlebars to present as small a target as possible for any further bullets from the crooks' guns.

But none came! In their firing back at him over the bridge and loosing off to scare the bulls, they had, apparently, used up all their ammunition.

And Rip had fired but one shot! That meant there were another nine in his magazine!



DISARMED — FROM THE DISTANCE! — The master criminal's finger curled round the trigger—but Rip's automatic spoke first. His lightning shot sent the crook's gun spinning.

Rip chuckled as he coaxed a few more revs. out of his engine.

There was but a couple of hundred yards between him and the car in front when he raised his gun.

Taking as careful an aim as the swaying of the cycle would permit, Rip let fly another shot.

It banged home in the centre of the petrol tank at the back, and Rip laughed aloud as he saw a spurt of spirit come pouring from the tank.

Soon all the fuel would run out and the crooks be forced to pull up.

But, Rip realised, they were four to one—better try another shot.

Crack! Crack!

He tried a couple!

A third report closely followed upon the two—as one of the racing car's back tyres burst.

The car skidded badly on the flat tyre. The man at the wheel wrenched upon it to try and right the car, but the next instant the flat tyre had sunk into the ditch at the side of the road and the car had turned completely over on its side, flinging its cargo violently out of the body.

Two of them lay still—completely knocked out by the concussion of the fall. And a third, the driver, yelling and shrieking at the top of his voice, was pinned beneath.

That left only one—"even" fighting, thought Rip, and laughed delightedly.

But this last man had been busily cramming fresh cartridges into the slide of his automatic, and now he rammed it into the butt and started to open fire upon Rip.

Rip slipped from his saddle and, allowing the machine to drop upon its side in the road, fell upon his face behind it to take cover.

Then he raised his gun and took careful aim.

The Master Crook's finger was curling round the trigger—the hammer rose menacingly. But Rip's automatic spoke first.

Crack! The shot drilled its way neatly through the right wrist of Rip's adversary and the pistol clattered to the road.

Rip rose to his feet and, still keeping the disarmed man covered, approached the wrecked car.

The back of it was slewed round towards him, and as he came nearer he saw something hanging out of the hole he had drilled in the back of the tank—something that sparkled and shone in the sunlight.

Approaching, curiously, still nearer, Rip gave a cry of triumph.

Hanging half through the hole was a diamond necklace.

The thieves had cunningly hidden it in the petrol tank for fear they were held up and searched by the police guarding the roads leading out of Dayntree.

"Well," chuckled Rip O'Farrell as he snatched out the necklace and thrust it into a pocket of his uniform, "I reckon that brings us to the end of a perfect day!"

And then, seating himself upon the debris of the car, he fired the remainder of the shots in the magazine of his auto. into the air to attract the attention of the police, whom he knew would already be making for the spot, lead by the sound of the earlier firing.

Ten minutes later Rip's hand was being pumped heartily by a keen-faced Superintendent, while the injured crooks were taken into custody. The one Rip had kept covered was securely manacled.

"Jove! Give me the boys of the Mounted for pluck," enthused the Superintendent. "You've pulled off a coup to be proud of, O'Farrell!"

Rip grinned. "Yes, pluck helps, sir," he said, "but so does the Paramount."

Boys, there's a programme worth promising in the old Mag. next week. Don't miss Napoleon and Captain Lefarge in a grand, long, o'-time tale.

Are You Reading Our New Wonder Air Story—Commencing To-day?

THE PLANET SCHOOLBOYS

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Last Voyage.

"WHAT was that?" asked Bags, starting to his feet.

They were in the saloon: Professor Roxley Drewe, Sir Bags, and Jerry Mannering. The boys had all gone to their cabins—worn out, and only too glad to sleep. And the men were in the saloon, enjoying a real smoke, and discussing the possibilities of this voyage through Outer Space. Would they be able to find the earth? Or would they go wandering through the Universe—into Eternity?

And then had come that jarring shock from the very bowels of the vessel.

"My motors—my motors!" panted the Professor, his eyes alight with alarm. "Something has happened to my ether motors, Clarence!"

He sped into the control-room, and a glance at the dials told him the truth. The *Solar Rover* was



no longer hurtling through space at ever increasing speed. She was slowing down—proving, beyond question, that some drastic harm had befallen her precious motors.

It was inevitable that Count Popandos' prison should be entered—so that the motors could be examined through the inspection trap. Indeed, in the general anxiety, Popandos was still forgotten. Until that door had been flung open, his very existence had been overlooked.

The Professor had gone down, with Bags and two of the engineers. And as they opened the door a wild, dishevelled figure came flying out.

"Popandos!" shouted Bags. "Good heavens! Now we know! The cur must have done something to the motors—Stop him, men—stop him!"

But Count Alexis Popandos was running like a hare—running along the corridor, and then out through the lounge, and towards one of the sealed doors.

"You thought you would hold me—but I am the better man," he screamed, in his frenzy.

"Stop!" yelled Bags. "You fool! Don't open that door—don't—"

But with a great heave of the lever Count Popandos had caused the hermetically sealed door to slide open. With a single plunge, he went out—and at the same moment a great wave of icy horror came into the ship. There was practically no air—nothing but the outer ether.

A wild, despairing scream sounded for the fraction of a second, but it was choked at its very inception.

Bags never knew how he did it, but he went to that lever and caused the door to seal itself again. And Count Popandos had gone. Bags had caught a glimpse of him, leaping over the rail—leaping downwards into space.

Bags turned aside, utterly sick. It had all happened so suddenly that he had hardly realised the deadliness of it until it was over.

(Continued on page 36.)



THE LAST OF A VILLAIN!—"Stop! Don't open that door—don't—don't!" But with a great heave of the lever Count Popandos caused the hermetically sealed door to slide open. With a single plunge he went out—and Sir Bags leapt to the door as a great wave of icy horror came into the ship.

A Thriller From The Word "Go"—This Yarn Introducing The Thames-side Boy Detective.

DICK O' THE WATERWAYS



Story No. 1 Tells How Detective Dick Meets A Pal In The Peril Fog.

Fighting Fearful Odds Against Ferocious River Crooks.

From Out Of The Fog.

DICK STARLING uttered a little exclamation of dismay as the ugly cargo lighter loomed up out of the thick, clammy fog and bore down upon his frail little boat like a monstrous shadow intent on destruction.

At the best of times that part of the Thames is unsafe to such small craft as Dick occupied, but when the river is overhung by fog it becomes little short of a series of death traps by reason of the shipping, stationary and moving, which rides its murky surface.

Dick had but a few brief seconds to act if he did not wish to be run down by the oncoming vessel. Brief as was the respite, it proved almost sufficient for the lad who knew the river and its perils better than he knew his way about the streets of the East End.

With a powerful pull on one sweep he swung his boat's nose to the right, then lying on both oars, stretched backward with all the strength of which he was capable.

The little boat shot forward under the frowning bows of the lighter. There was a slight concussion and Dick felt his boat slew half-way round as the other's prow caught it a glancing blow.

Something glided snakily through the air, landing across the thwarts close by Dick's elbow. It was a rope. Instinctively he clutched it as a harsh, fog-thickened voice hailed him from above.

"Ahoy, there, mate! Get a grip o' that rope an' lash it to your dinghy!"

Dick obeyed the behest mechanically. He sensed that the lighter was slowing up. Presently it stopped altogether. A lantern was raised over the bows of

the bigger vessel, and, looking upward, Dick descried a bloated, evil face leering down upon him.

"All right, mate," said the fog-laden voice again. "We thought you was never comin'. Make haste an' shin up here. The stuff's ready for yer."

Dick hesitated for a moment. The speaker evidently had mistaken him for somebody else. The lad was on the point of saying so when the other spoke again.

"What in h— are yer waitin' for?" came the hissing voice venomously. "By heck! If yer ain't on deck in two shakes I'll tell Foo Wang to take some o' the skin off yer silly back!"

This decided Dick. Whatever was going forward—and he believed there was some underhand work in connection with this unexpected meeting in the fog—the lad made up his mind to learn more about it.

Seizing the clammy rope, he climbed it like a monkey and, scrambling over the bulwarks of the lighter, confronted a little group of men who regarded him with threatening looks.

The man who bore the lantern—a hulking fellow clad in reefer coat and peaked cap, treated him to a vicious snarl.

"Nice way o' doin' yer job, eh?" he growled. "Nigh on an hour late, an' the cop's boat hangin' on our heels. Reckon Wang 'll have something t' say ter this, my lad."

He turned to give a few sharp orders to his companions before Dick could formulate any reply. There followed a series of little thuds as five or six packages were dropped into the waiting dinghy.

The man who had done the talking thrust a piece of paper into Dick's hand. "Sign for six!" he snapped. "Here's a pencil. Be quick!"

The lad did so, scrawling his signature as illegibly

as he could manage. The other snatched the document and passed it over to one of his friends.

"Right y'are, mate: shin back into the dinghy," he bade Dick. He followed the boy down the rope and dropped heavily into a seat. "Off yer go!" he growled.

Dick felt himself trapped nicely. Naturally, he had not the faintest idea of where his unwelcome passenger desired to be taken.

His brain worked like lightning on the problem. Of a sudden an idea struck him. He strove to instil a certain sullen fierceness into his voice as he turned upon the man.

"Garn!" he snarled, "take a turn at rowin' yerself. I'm beat with doin' it for the last two hours. Sides, you're bigger'n stronger than me."

"Lazy little rat!" snorted the other. He took the middle of the boat. "Here, gimme the bloomin' sweeps an' get out o' me way!"

He knocked Dick flying into the stern sheets and applied himself to his task with a reckless disregard for any obstruction that might suddenly appear out of the fog.

Picking himself up, Dick sat down and carefully considered his position.

That he was embarked on an enterprise which might spell peril for him, he had no doubt. The mention of the police boat told him that. But he was a plucky youth, and had encountered too many risks in the past to be unduly frightened by the mere prospect of danger. He would see this out, he decided, and sat back to await events.

The man rowed steadily, never speaking a word. Despite the thickness of the fog Dick knew they were making in the direction of Wapping Old Stairs. He wondered in what sort of a place he would eventually find himself. That particular part had no very savoury reputation, as he was well aware.

Presently the little boat drew close enough to the shore for Dick to recognise the line of docks. They crept up against the strong tide and edging the dinghy up against the bank, the man unshipped the oars and sprang out.

Dick followed on his heels. "Make her fast," ordered the other. "I'll collect the stuff."

He did so, giving three of the packages to Dick to carry, retaining the remainder himself. Then, without a word he strode rapidly towards the causeway and halted before the door of a ramshackle building some distance further on.

Dick listened with wildly beating heart as the man gave a succession of jerky raps upon the panel. After the lapse of five or six minutes the sound of creaking bolts reached his ears.

The door opened a couple of inches.

"Who's there?" demanded a quavering voice in lisping English.

Dick's companion growled some reply which the lad failed to catch. Immediately the door opened sufficiently to permit them to squeeze through, being closed and re-bolted behind them.

Dick followed the two along a dark passage until they reached another door at the bottom of which a line of light showed. In reply to a tap upon it a voice bade: "Come in!"

They entered and Dick found himself in a tiny apartment whose only furniture consisted of a small, square table and one high-backed chair. This latter was occupied by an individual who rose to his feet at their appearance.

The man was a Chinese of obviously high caste. With great dignity he awaited their approach, his yellow face completely impassive, his almond eyes almost hidden behind drooping lids.

Dick stole a glance at his companion. He was surprised at the latter's altered demeanour. From a hectoring bully he had become the acme of cringing humility.

"You are late, my friend," the Chinaman murmured in soft, gentle tones. "There is, perhaps, a reason?"

The burly sailor licked dry lips before replying. "It ain't my fault, Foo Wang," he said hoarsely. He jerked a huge thumb at Dick. "Ask this young scamp what he's been a-doin' of all the evening."

Dick felt rather than saw the almond eyes turned upon him in lazy but terribly searching scrutiny. Foo Wang's head did not move.

"And, Morton, pray why should I trouble to ask anything of your friend?" he asked softly.

Morton's bloodshot eyes goggled. "Blimey! I like that!" he exclaimed. "Why, ain't he your own bloke wot yer told us to look out for?"

Foo Wang shook his head slowly. "Dear me—no," he murmured. "I have not had the pleasure of seeing him before now."

The words—commonplace in themselves—were uttered with a subtle menace that made Dick's blood suddenly run cold.

As for the sailor, he seemed to go all to pieces. He gaped at Foo Wang with stark terror in his eyes and his thick-lipped mouth hung wide and loose.

The Horror Of The Pit.

"YER—yer ain't seen him before?" Morton repeated in a dazed sort of way. He pulled himself together with an obvious effort. "Hoi, guv'nor; what d'yer mean by that?"

DICK O' THE WATERWAYS AGAIN NEXT WEEK, CHAPS, IN A THRILLING YARN OF THE THAMES-SIDE.

THE CAPTURED EXPLORER.



Other fine features include the First of a Rattling Series of Footer tales, featuring

MARK FORWARD, THE WIZARD FOOTBALLER, FOOTBALLER AND DETECTIVE.

The first mysterious case next week. It's our Special Thrill Detective Number, chaps, and an Extra-Special long story of Falcon Swift, the Monocled Man-hunter, and his Amazing Boy Assistant will appear

THE SCHOOLMASTER DETECTIVE.



INTO THE RAT PIT—A look of fury overspread the visage of the terrible Chinaman. He pointed. "Over with him," he commanded, and stood back as the sailor, kicking like a wild cat, was thrust forward to the edge of the pit.

Foo Wang smiled blandly. "Just what I say, my good friend. This lad—I have never laid eyes on him until this moment."

The stark terror again took possession of the sailor. He stared from Dick to the Chinese and back to Dick. His fleshy lips trembled when he spoke.

"Then—then this young bloke ain't in the game at all—wasn't sent by you for—" he broke off, fearful to complete the sentence.

Foo Wang nodded gently. The other's face flamed with a sudden devilish expression. He wheeled round upon Dick, starting like a human tornado.

"Yer sp'ing hound!" he bellowed furiously. "Deceive Josh Morton, would yer? By heck! I'm a-goin' ter tear yer limb from limb!"

He would have hurled himself upon the lad had not the Chinaman laid a restraining, claw-like hand on his arm. Foo Wang must have possessed great strength. He twisted the burly sailor with consummate ease.

"No—no, my friend; there must be no trouble, not of my making," he murmured.

Morton fell back sullenly. Foo Wang regarded Dick with the same bland smile. Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, he clapped his yellow hands together.

As if by magic four other Chinamen appeared on the threshold of the door. All appeared to be unarmed but a more evil-looking quartette the lad had never seen.

They halted in answer to a sign from Wang, who turned upon the frightened Morton.

"It is a pity you were so careless, Morton," he murmured tonelessly, "for you know the punishment in such cases."

The sailor went livid. "C-come, Wang; yer joking!" he stammered. "Wot yer goin' ter do?"

For answer Foo made another sign to his henchmen. Instantly the four Chinks hurled themselves at Dick and Morton.

But the latter, evidently suspecting danger, was not caught entirely unawares. Lugging forth a

pistol he presented it at the attackers who halted before the threatening barrel.

"Ba-k, yer dirty scum!" snarled Morton. "The first bloke ter move dies!"

For the moment he had forgotten the proximity of Wang. This lapse of memory proved his undoing. With a swift upward jerk of his arm Wang sent the weapon flying through the air to land with a thud at the other side of the room.

Once more the Chinamen flung themselves at the two Britishers.

"Fight like the devil if yer value yer life!" yelled the sailor to Dick Starling.

Dick obeyed to the best of his ability. He got in a couple of useful blows ere his assailants bore him to the ground, where a length of rope quickly binding his arms soon reduced him to impotency.

The hulking Morton was proving a bigger handful. Even as Dick got his first opportunity of a clear view of the fray the sailor ramméd home a terrific blow that lifted its recipient clean off his feet and flung him into the high-backed chair.

A hideous scream of mortal agony was wrung from the fellow's lips. For a second he remained seated, his eyes fixed in a wild stare. Then, like a half-filled sack, he swayed forward and fell to the ground, to lie a huddled mass of humanity.

The others paid no attention to him as they bore in upon Morton, driving him up against the wall.

Suddenly a contrivance curled up close to the sailor's head and encircled his bull neck, drawing him remorselessly tight up against the wall.

He struggled madly to release himself, without avail. The mechanical arm pressed on, until his tongue protruded and his florid face became a deep purple. Only when consciousness had deserted his half-choked senses did Foo Wang press a button which caused the arm to be withdrawn into its well-concealed recess.

As Morton lolled forward, the Chinese gripped him and commenced to carry him from the room. Dick

was lifted to his feet and hurried along in their wake, Foo Wang bringing up the rear.

AFTER traversing many dark passages and descending a flight of stone steps, the party at last emerged into a small, enclosed yard.

The steady lap-lap of water told Dick that they were close to the river. As a matter of fact the Thames flowed by the yard, and almost on a level with it. But owing to the density of the fog it was impossible to see the murky surface.

At an order from Foo Wang a bucket of water was flung over the unobtrusive Morton. When this had been done twice the sailor began to show signs of recovery.

Presently he sat up and looked about him. No sooner did he observe the evil visage of Wang bending over him than the old fear of the latter returned to him.

He endeavoured to drown this terror by means of a display of bluster.

"Yer yeller swine!" he snarled at the other. "Wot's yer idear, anyhow? If it's murder, then the cops 'll get yer for a certainty."

"No, my friend, I think not," was the suave answer. "As to murder—well, that is a game I do not—play—at least, openly."

"Yer a liar!" was the furious retort. Morton struggled to his feet. His eyes alighted on a deep excavation that yawned almost at his side. He started back as if he had been stung.

"Not—not that!" he cried. "My Gawd, Wang, not that!"

He swung aside as if to make a dash for freedom. The three Chinamen closed in upon him. In a moment a terrific battle was in progress.

Dimly to Dick's ears, as he lay helpless on the ground, came a peculiar squeaking from the depths of the pit.

The Vengeance Of Foo Wang.

MORTON fought with the courage of despair, but, big though he was, his agile assailants were too much for him.

Raging, yet helpless to render assistance, Dick Starling watched the Chinks fling the sailor to earth where they quickly overpowered him and bound his huge arms together.

At a command from Foo Wang both captives were hauled to their feet. The sinister-faced leader confronted them, still smiling blandly.

"Surely you realise how useless it is to resist?" he murmured. "My men are experts in Jiu-Jitsu; you have no chance against them."

He motioned the others to lead Dick and Morton closer to the pit into which he pointed.

"See!" he said. "My little pets, ready, as usual, for a meal that, alas! I can only provide them under such rare circumstances as the present."

He glanced at the sailor. "You, Morton, have seen them before, but they will be new to our young friend here."

Fas-tened by the sheer horror of the sight, Dick gazed into the depths and watched the mass of black, struggling, squeaking bodies below.

No need to tell him what they were. Too long had the lad knocked about the docks and riverside not to recognise those denizens of the wharves.

They were water rats—vermin of all sizes, all equally ferocious and, in their present numbers, capable of tearing to pieces within a few minutes the strongest specimen of mankind.

The scheme lying behind the inhuman yellow countenance regarding him burst upon Dick in a rush of nauseous disgust.

Foo Wang meant to thrust them alive into that pit of death!

"You scoundrel!" he cried in horrified dismay. "You cannot mean to do this dastardly thing—you wouldn't dare!"

"You shall see," was the soft reply. "First Morton will provide us with amusement—"

He stopped, and a look of fury overswept his yellow visage. His teeth showed in an awful snarl.

"Accursed traitors! Did you think to put Foo Wang in danger of being trapped by your police dogs? Never will you live to play false again!"

He made a sign to Morton's guards. "Over with him!" he yelled, and stood back, as the sailor, kicking like a wild cat, was thrust forward.

They got him to the edge of the pit and gave the roaring fellow a push. By a miracle of some kind he managed to retain his balance and remained swaying on the lip.

In-automatically, one of the Chinamen stepped in to administer a second thrust. The terrified sailor swung round upon him with a bull like bellow.

His heavily-shod foot shot out, catching the other full in the stomach. For an agonising second the man strove to prevent the catastrophe...

Then, to the accompaniment of a hideous shriek, he disappeared from sight. Dick shut his eyes as the squeaking vermin closed over his recumbent form in a living tide.

A grinding noise close at hand, followed by a sound of stern voices raised in shouted commands, caused him to open them again.

A boat of some sort had come to rest by the exposed side of the yard. Dick could just make the latter's outline through the fog. A half-dozen figures sprang ashore and came hurrying forward.

Dick recognised the uniforms of London's river police. A lad of about his own age led the van, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Collar 'em, lads!" roared one of the officers. "Shoot if they try to escape."

Dick observed Foo Wang glide away in the shadow of the wall. He tried to shout a warning to this effect, but could not make his voice heard above the general din.

Finding themselves trapped, the remaining Chinks turned to do battle with the attackers. Knives flashed dully and twice the staccato report of a revolver split the air.

"The pit! Look out for the pit!" yelled the youth who led the police.

The warning was not unnecessary. Once or twice an officer, beguiled by the cunning of his enemy would have fallen a victim to the rats had it not been for the youth's continuous shouting.

The end of the affray came at last. With one of their number severely wounded, the other pair gave in and allowed themselves to be taken aboard the police boat.

A few deft slashes of a knife released Dick's hands. The unknown boy scanned his face curiously.

"Mistook yer for me, I'll lay," he said, with the shrewd intuition of his gamin tribe. "But say, guv'nor, where's that rotten Wang got ter?"

Dick explained. The other turned upon the policemen like a fury.

"Blimey, 'e's gone!" he yelled. "Foller me, you blokes! If I can't lead yer ter 'im my name's not Tommy the Rat. Kin' hon!"

Dick joined the rush made in the speaker's wake. For the first time he noted the absence of Morton. But before he could satisfy himself as to the sailor's whereabouts, they had entered the building.

Only the sound of Tommy's boots on the stone flags served to guide them in the darkness. Along

(Continued on page 28.)

The Brilliant Light of the Fourth Form Seeks the Limelight by Producing a Play. Powerful; Full of Punch, Pep and Steam! But it Petered out 'Midst Roars of Laughter.



CURTAIN—QUICK! POOF! THE BAD EGGS AND CABBAGES THAT WERE AIMED AT THESE AMATEUR THEATRICALS!

The Diamond of Disaster.

SCORCHER SMITH'S study was packed to suffocation by fully a dozen excited juniors, all talking at once.

In the centre of this agitated mob stood the inimitable Percival Socrates Smith himself, his fingers stuffed into his ears.

"Look here, Smith," bellowed Bates of the New House, "I want a part in this play."

"Righto! You can be the back legs of the elephant."

"But there isn't an elephant in the play, fathead."

"That's why I suggested it," said Smith wearily.

"Don't be a silly ass," snapped Bates crossly.

"I'm not, I know you hate competition."

"Look here——"

"Oh, sit on him, somebody!"

Carstairs and Sandeman promptly obliged, and Bates' babblings were temporarily stifled.

Smith held up his hand, and the noise abated somewhat. "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears——"

"Peace ho! Anthony speaks," murmured Carstairs.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Smith favoured his chum with a baleful look. "Shurrup, Car. I'm sorry, you chaps, but as there are only six characters in my play you can't all have a part."

"What are you playing?" asked "Bunny" Bent bluntly.

"Ahem! The Prince Shujah of Mahoota."

"The most important role in the cast," growled Bunny.

"Well, I wrote the play didn't I?"

"Did you?" asked Bent, raising his eyebrows insolently.

"Look here, d'you mean to insinuate that I cribbed it?"

"Well it reads very much like one I saw in London during the vac."

"Look here——"

"Look here——"

"Oh! shut up, both of you," shouted Carstairs, "or you'll have one of the beaks comin'."

Ever since it had leaked out that Scorcher was going to stage a mystery play, "The Diamond of Disaster," written by himself, he had been pestered by juniors offering their services.

Smith had told them that he would be delighted to engage them as scene shifters, but the ambitious schoolboys wanted to act, hence the heated discussion in the end study.

"Carstairs, Braith, Parsons, Sandeman, Conway and myself form the cast," said Scorcher finally.

"Volunteers for sellin' programmes will be welcomed, any offers?"

Offers there were none, if one were to judge by the silence which followed the request, and one by one the disappointed juniors filed out of the study, leaving the six principals to swot up their parts.

Silence reigned save for the occasional rustle of a sheet being turned over.

Rap! came a knock on the door.

"Scat!" said Carstairs briefly.

The door opened, and the fat form of Bertie Moxon insinuated itself into the study. He blinked at the six studious youths, then coughed slightly. No response. Bertie coughed louder, and Smith glanced up. "Buzz off, Bertie, we're busy!"

"I say Scorch, old fellow—"

"Smith to you, you fat frog," snapped Percival Scorch.

"I say, Scor—er, Smith, old man, can you find a part for me in your play?"

"It's a drama, not a pantomime," said Smith rudely.

Bertie affected not to notice the insult. "I tell you what. I'll play Prince Shujah," he suggested magnanimously.

"You dashed well won't," snapped Scorch.

"Well—er—the detective."

"Not this time," contradicted Parsons.

"All right, I don't mind being the professor."

"But I do," put in Conway.

"Lord Linton, then?"

"That's my part," Carstairs growled.

"Well, I'm not particular, I'm willing to play the butler."

"I'm not!" roared Sandeman.

"Very well, Braith, do you mind standing?"

"Yes, I jolly well do. Get out!" snorted Don.

Bertie looked from one to another of the six juniors, and his little round eyes smouldered with rage.

"All right, all right. You'll be sorry for this," he muttered.

"Not so sorry as you," grinned Braith, lunging out with his foot.

"Ow!"

Bertie yelped as Don's hefty boot hastened his departure. The captain of the Fourth locked the door, and the amateur actors were not interrupted again that night.

SCORCHER SMITH proceeded along the Fourth-form passage in an amiable frame of mind.

The junior common-room, where his play was being staged, was packed with boys, both juniors and seniors. The curtain would rise in a few minutes, and Scorch, who did not appear until half-way through the first act, was on his way to his study, where he would assume the part of Prince Shujah of Mahoota.

As he opened the door, a bulky form brushed past him from within, and scuttled down the corridor as fast as his short, fat legs would carry him.

Smith started after the retreating figure with astonishment.

"Bertie Moxon! What the deuce was he doin' in the study?"

After satisfying himself that the food in the cupboard was intact, he dismissed the sneak from his mind. There were matters of greater importance than Bertie to occupy his thoughts. He was on the point of removing his clothing, when the door was flung open, and in strode Bates of the New House, followed by half-a-dozen of his cronies.

"Collar him!" rapped out the bully.

Scorch jumped to his feet. "Help! School House! Res—Ow!"

He broke off with a yell as he went down under the concerted rush of seven determined juniors, and a few seconds later saw him bound and gagged.

Bates chuckled as he looked down at his conquered foe, writhing and squirming desperately. "No good, Smith, you can't get loose. Sorry and all that," he moaned.

"Mmmmm—" came from behind the gag.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," grinned Bates. "If you're worrying about the play, set your little mind at rest. I'm playing your part. You won't be missed."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Scorch's angry eyes followed the actions of the New House fellows, and he groaned inwardly. The bouncer was going to muck up the play on which he had spent so much time and trouble to make it a success.

Bates worked quickly, and five minutes later he was transformed from a schoolboy into the garb of an Indian Prince. He turned to Scorch.

"This the stuff for darkening the chivvy?" he asked, indicating a small jar on the table.

Scorch nodded.

The bully applied the colouring on hands, neck and face, then slipped on a long black beard; a jewelled turban completed the disguise.

Barson stood back and gazed admiringly at his leader.

"Great, Bates! They'll never be able to tell you from Smith."

Bates critically studied his reflection in the glass, then satisfied that his disguise would pass muster, turned to his cronies.

"I'll toddle along to the stage now. You fellows had better clear off and bag some seats. Ta! Ta! Scorch."

He waved his hand to the School House fellow, then left the room. A minute or two later the rest turned out the light and followed, chuckling with glee.

Scorch struggled feverishly, but his efforts only had the effect of tightening the cords, and after a while he desisted, breathing hard.

BATES wended his way to the back of the stage, which had been erected at one end of the junior common-room, and patiently waited his cue, which would be when the butler (Sandeman) announced: "Prince Shujah of Mahoota!"

Eventually it came, and Bates, looking for all the world like an Eastern potentate, swept majestically on to the stage.

Conway (the professor), Carstairs (Lord Linton) and Parsons (the detective) were standing in one corner of the "room," discussing in low tones an immense, scintillating stone, which they passed from one to another.

Lord Linton, who was host, came forward and extended his hand to greet his guest.

"It is an honour and a pleasure indeed to meet one, whose wise and judicious rulings over—er—millions of dusky, yet wital, British subjects have—er—gained the admiration and affection of the Motherland."

Bates bowed and chanted solemnly:

"Your kindness, Linton sahib, is only exceeded by your personal beauty, which is, I fear, invisible to the naked eye."

A titter ran round the common-room, and the actors stared at the nabob in astonishment. This was certainly not Scorch's line. Carstairs recovered his presence of mind, and to each of his guests in turn he introduced the "Prince." Conway gasped and Parsons could not suppress a little cry as their hands were seized in a vice-like grip. They rubbed their aching fingers, and regarded "Prince Shujah" with hostile looks.

Really Scorch was overdoing it. Carstairs held up the glittering "diamond." "Your fame, Prince Shujah, as an authority on precious stones, has spread even to these shores, and I should esteem your opinion as to the value of this particular jewel."

The Prince took it, and eyed it critically, then, turning to his host, burst out:

"You fool! You silly old fool! This has no more value than your microscopic brain. It is glass. See, I will prove it." He dropped it on to the floor, and crushed it beneath his foot.

The actors stared at him in amazement. Had Scorchler gone dotty? They all knew it was glass, of course, but instead of proclaiming the fact, he should have expressed amazement, and valued the "jewel" at at least £20,000.

Bates' face was livid with mock fury as he addressed the flabbergasted Carstairs. "You spawn-faced baboon! You incredibly brainless ninny! You have brought me thousands of miles over land and sea to show me this worthless piece of glass! Pah! You great idiot!"

He seized the "professor's" beard, and Conway gave a shrill yell as the false whiskers were torn from his face.

The audience was now in hysterics. Scorchler's drama was developing into a burlesque. But the juniors, ignorant of the plot, thought it all to be in the play, and were enjoying it immensely.

Bates picked up a vase of flowers from the table, and sent it crashing at Parson's head, who ducked just in time. Sandeman yelled with pain and fury as an ink-pot smote him on the chin, distributing its contents over his shirt and coat.

"I, Prince Shujah of Mahoota, have been hoaxed! Tricked!" bellowed Bates, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. He whipped out his sword from its scabbard, and brandished it in the air.

"You dogs! Your lives and blood alone can wipe out this flagrant insult. Scum!"

The actors scattered before the infuriated "nabob," and the audience rocked with mirth.

Butler wiped his streaming eyes! Oh, my hat! What-what-a joke! oh, ha! ha!"

Bates lunged at Carstairs, who gave a fiendish yell as the blade penetrated the seat of his trousers, pricking the skin.

He made a rush for the door leading off the stage with his fellow-actors at his heels. They flung the door to, and hurled themselves against it, quite convinced in their own minds that Scorchler had gone mad.

Bates thrust his sword into its sheath, then, with a final growl, disappeared from view of the audience, who were now cheering and shouting with hysterical glee.

Barson held his aching sides. "Oh dear! It's-it's-ha! ha! the fun-fun-ha! ha! funniest thing I've ever-ever seen, ha! ha! ha!"

Butler nodded, he was too weak to talk.

Of the whole crowd only Bunny Bent was serious. He had seen the "book" of the play, and realised that something was amiss. The hilarious behaviour of the New House fellows and the absence of Bates supplied the solution to the peculiar attitude of Prince Shujah.

He left the common-room hurriedly, and burst into Scorchler's study. By the flickering light of a match, he discerned the prince of japers lying bound hand and foot on the floor.

"My aunt!" he ejaculated.

Quickly he released Smith, who stood up and stretched his cramped and aching limbs. What happened, Bunny? Did the rotters muck up the play?" he asked, eagerly.

The other nodded, "Yes, Bates, I suppose it was he, ruined the whole giddy show. Yanked Conway's beard off, threw an ink-pot at Sandeman, then chased 'em all round the stage with a bally sword



BLACK AS HE WAS PAINTED.—The door of the Fourth form dormitory was ajar, and Smith listened for a minute. From within came Bully Bates' agonised tones: "I can't get this beastly stuff off my skin," he said.

while the school went delirious. My hat! It was a pantomime!"

Smith groaned dismally. "Oh, the bounders! The blisters! the thugs!" He pulled himself together. "Listen, Bunny, Round up the fellows. We're going to make a raid on Bates & Co. I'll meet you in five minutes outside the New House."

"Righto!" agreed Bunny, and departed. At the appointed time, Scorcher Smith, at the head of twenty determined School House fellows entered their rivals' territory.

Carstairs grabbed a grubby-faced fag by the ear. "Where's Bates, Smutty?" he demanded. "Ow, Carstairs, you beast, you're hurting. Upstairs in the dorm, confound you!"

They ascended the stairs in a body and marched along the corridor. The door of the Fourth-form dormitory was ajar, and Smith listened for a minute. From within came the splashing of water, then Bates' anguished tones: "I can't get this beastly stuff off my skin," he bleated.

"Try this brush," suggested Barson. Again came the sounds of vigorous splashing and towelling. Scorcher peeped round the door and chuckled. Bates was scrubbing his hands and face desperately, but, for all his efforts, he could not remove the dark stains from his skin. He was nearly in tears. Oh, my hat! What-what ever shall I do?"

Scorcher flung open the door, and in crowded the School House fellows. "Lock the door, Car," said the prince of jaspers, and his chum obeyed.

"Look here! What's the game?" stammered the bully in alarm. His face, brick-red under its duskiness and fringed with soapsuds, presented a most ludicrous appearance, and the School House fellows howled with laughter.

"All right, Bates dear. We've only come to wash you. Your aspect is a discredit to the school. Grab him, you chaps!"

Bates was duly grabbed, as also were his cronies, Butler, Barson, and Billings.

Scorcher soaped a stiff-bristled brush and dipped it into the hot water.

"Won't come off, Bates, you say? You did not rub hard enough. Let me see what I can do."

He bent over the struggling junior and vigorously applied the brush.

"Ow! Ow!" yelled Bates with pain and anger.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Smith flung down the brush. "That's the best I can do for you, Bates," he said regretfully. "I dare say it will wear off in time. Kim on, you chaps."

The School House fellows beat a hasty retreat before the alarm could be raised, and they crossed the quad, still chuckling over the bully's discomfort.

"I say, Smith," said Carstairs. "It's dashed funny about that stuff Bates used not coming off."

"Not at all," grinned Scorcher. "I'm beginning to understand now. You remember Bertie Moxon saying that we'd all be sorry for refusin' him a part in the play. Well, the fat worm was in our study when I went in to change to-night, an' he evidently substituted the theatrical colourin' for some of his own composition. Dunno what was in it. Boot-blackin', soot an' ink, probably."

The juniors chuckled afresh at the thought of how the tables had accidentally been turned on Bates.

* * * * *

A week passed before the bully's face assumed its natural colour, and his every appearance in public evoked roars of mirth from the whole school.

DICK O' THE WATERWAYS—

(Continued from page 24.)

passages, and up the stairs Dick had descended a prisoner a short while before, the party rushed, until finally their guide halted outside Foo Wang's room.

The door was shut, but the light within still shone from beneath it. With a quick thrust of his shoulder, the gamin sent it flying back on its hinges.

The police, revolvers in hand, sprang over the threshold—then came to a simultaneous halt with exclamations of surprise.

The apartment was exactly as Dick had seen it last. On the floor sprawled the Chinaman at the foot of the high-backed chair. Of Foo Wang there was no sign whatever.

But there was distinct evidence of his having been in the room. And that evidence took the shape of a huddled form seated in the chair.

It was Morton—Morton, still with his arms bound, yet no longer a Morton possessing any interest in worldly doings.

For the burly sailor was dead!

They lifted him gently to the floor. From the back of the chair protruded a myriad of needle-like steel points. The sergeant in charge of the party indicated them with a shudder of fear.

"Poisoned, undoubtedly," he muttered. "This chap must have followed Wang and tried to stop his escape. The Chink evidently dumped him into this lot."

He paused to look about him.

"Anyhow, to-night's business has stopped their cocaine-running for some time," he finished abruptly.

"As it?" muttered Tommy the Rat to Dick. "Blimey, yer mustn't forget as Wang's still about."

There's a Stunning Surprise on the Way, Chums!
Magnificent Free Gifts for All of You. Watch the
Chat for News.

THE WAR ON WINGS—

(Continued from page 12.)

His face was set and grim as he watched that skilfully-handled aircraft drop slowly on to the plateau of grey rock within twenty yards of where they stood, a machine that glowed with that green phosphorescent light in the darkness.

"The deuce!" he gritted. "That's one of Sin Manfu's hornets!"

Dick felt the Air Marshal's fingers tighten on his arm.

"We've got to fight a lone hand, Dick, to save this island for good old England—"

His voice snapped into silence as a door in the fuselage of the big fighter swung open. A towering figure stepped out—a man whose flowing garments in that dim light were reminiscent of the East.

Tornado Crichton stiffened as his gaze fell on that uplifted yellow face, the cruel almond eyes, the massive protruding jaw—a face that held something that was utterly ruthless and evil.

"Prince Sin Manfu." The Air Marshal's low-pitched voice held a note of grim anticipation. "We'll clip his wings before the night's out, my son!"

Flaming War in the Skies! All the World is seething with the dread news. And not a stone's throw away from Dick and England's Air Chief stands the sinister p'otter whose ambition has brought about the calamity. This Yarn is going to be the B.M.'s Biggest Scoop, Boys That means there'll be a rush for Next Week's Magnificent Number. Better Order It, eh? It's safest.

The Schoolmaster Detective Positively Appears
Next Week in a Thrilling Tale of School and
Thrills. Don't Miss this Yarn, Chums!

Great News! Mark Forward, The Mystery Detective and His Boy Raggles Coming in a Footer Serial. Next Week.



The Jungle Joker.

SAMBO was turning, running and dodging from the yelling savages. But all the time he was making for the white ruins of the Hidden City—the City of the Apes!

The natives stopped, more in superstitious awe than in physical fear, as they saw Sambo's objective.

Many times before, the black cricketer had demonstrated his unanny powers. But his appearance on the scene of the killing, after he had dived head foremost in the balloon basket into the crocodile-infested river, was thought to be the biggest magic of all.

Certainly it was miraculous that Sambo was still alive.

But, as has been pointed out before in this narrative, the black man was a river marvel, a really wonderful swimmer and general aquatic performer. Almost it would seem that he could see down into the turbid beds of the African rivers; certain it was that he knew how to manoeuvre out of the way of the clumsy crocodile who inhabited their muddy depths.

He had simply stayed under water, swimming like an otter, allowing the natives to believe him drowned. And so he had seen the big-game cricketers carried off to the sacrificial altar in the jungle; he had watched the fires and other preparations for the dreadful feast, and he had cudgled his brains desperately for some ruse by which he might effect the release of his chums.

No idea came to Sambo, save the persistent one that moved like a tiny but all-devouring maggot in his brain.

He must kill Velasquez. The villain of the piece! That was it. Sambo hated "the Big Boss" with a hatred that was healthy but decidedly primitive. He had reserved in his own mind a fate for Henri Velasquez that it would not have been nice for that gentleman to contemplate.

Sambo peered through the jungle at the fires, the savages carrying sticks to the ovens, and Velasquez, dressed in his native skirt and parrot plumes, his face hideously streaked with betel juice—Velasquez, stalking to and fro from the frowning devil house, posing in his part as the witch doctor.

THE BIG GAME CRICKETERS

THE JUNGLE JOKER.

A Primitive Ape Plays the Trump Card in the Grim Game and in the Jungle a d Enables the Big Game Cricketers to Reach a Triumphant Conclusion to Their Quest.

And Sambo knew a great regret that he must kill Velasquez outright.

He would preferably have chosen some terrible lingering death, such as that which the monster had designed for the big-game cricketers. Nevertheless, Velasquez's continued presence on the earth was becoming exceedingly dangerous, and he must be removed quickly and not at leisure, as Sambo would have desired.

Therefore, Sambo set about finding a blowpipe and a poisoned dart.

He had great trouble in finding one, for the natives collected their arrows as a boy might collect his marbles after using them. Each one was precious. These savages were far from their usual haunts, where arrows might be manufactured and poisoned at leisure.

But eventually Sambo found one, and as we know, the arrow was not adequately poisoned. It transfixed Velasquez's shoulder just as he had been on the point of using his terrible butcher's knife on Jimmy Brent on the sacrificial stone.

Sambo had planned his appearance and his act for the psychological moment. With the blowpipe at his mouth, he had come boldly into the native village, into the very circle of the camp fires. It was a tragedy to him that Velasquez did not fall in the death paroxysms induced by the poison. The dart was "second hand," and the poison was no longer on it.

Sambo's greatest magic had failed.

He turned and ran incontinently. Not without a thought did he stumble through the jungle; there was lively satisfaction in his brain that the whole village of savages had given chase, yelling like dervishes in his wake. Sambo liked to have his own importance appreciated. When the limelight fell on his dark and fascinating personality he was happy.

Nevertheless, he was appreciating every point in the new aspect affairs had taken. In the first case the odds were that he would become the trophy of some spearman's skill, but more important to Sambo was the fact that the respite for his friends was only temporary. When they had pinned him down with these spears that were flying past him, they would take him back to the feast—that hideous, primitive feast that Sambo had interrupted.

Sambo knew more than his white friends of the terrible rites of the savages, the tortures to which they put their victims. And he shuddered at the thought of his friends' fate. Even as he ran, his mind was revolving desperately on some scheme—some idea . . .

And then it came, a wild, mad plan!

He knew his topography of the jungle by now, and his crashing, headlong progress through the jungle led him towards the City of the Apes.

He came out through the tangle of lianas, and other prickly growth a wild, dishevelled figure, stumbling over the silent, starlit plateau that once had grown the marvellous Hurculane, but now was bare and denuded.

And the savages bursting after him stayed their progress and stared in awe. It was night. Yonder, in those crumbling white buildings, that looked like the ruins of some bizarre Eastern city, the apes shuffled.

At night they could see. At night they were active, and if slow and ponderous, they were terrible in their strength. And Sambo was running right into this death trap!

Verily this was a man of magic. A great and wonderful scorcerer! The natives stood watching as their prey plunged into the white, eerie ruins. Not a spear was thrown now, not an arm was raised, spite of the string of foul oaths and imprecations that Velasquez hurled at the black men. The savages stood ready to scatter back into the fastnesses of their jungle depths at the first move from those shuffling forms. Nevertheless they stayed as long as they dared, impelled by a dread curiosity.

Sambo knew the odds against him ever coming alive out of that den of primitive animals.

It were better, he considered, to die in the savage embrace of an ape than to die having witnessed the torture of his friends. And Sambo had one card remaining that he meant to play.

No agonised death screams issued from the ruined city, though the savages' vigil lengthened from minutes into an hour. Their curiosity was intense. They could not tell what Sambo's fate had been, but they believed that he had triumphed. Here was a man of great and impressive magic.

Velasquez stood by convulsed with rage, yet powerless. They would not listen now to him. They were far from their usual jungle haunts, and they wanted a witch doctor who would guide them aright. So their fickle favour veered.

And Sambo? He was playing his last card.

Fire! That was it. He had several loose matches in his pocket, wet and useless from his immersion in the river. But there was one that somehow had become secreted in Sambo's tobacco pouch, and its head was dry. He had one match with which to put his fate to the test.

Hardly were his plans fully conceived. He only knew that he meant to fire the Hidden City, and drive the jungle apes out. What a hideous weapon they would be in their terror-stricken flight from the fire if he, Sambo, could guide them so that they should fall upon the savages!

But his plans were all wild conjecture.

He had yet to penetrate the City of the Apes.

As he crept round a white, bell-topped building that might have been an Oriental mosque, he clenched his teeth with compressed lips and dilated nostrils, frowning against the smell of the beasts.

It was foul and utterly nauseating. And just as certain perfumes have power to please the senses, so this fever-stricken animal stench set Sambo's hardy nerves jangling, so that he fancied his every step was dogged by the hideous beasts.

Everything around was dark and oppressive, save for the ghostly white buildings that loomed out of the night. There was not silence, however. There came the distant snarling and rumbling of the apes, the crack of some mighty bone. The brutes were feeding.

Sambo cautiously pit-patted over the bare ground.

It struck him all of a sudden that he had been stupid. There was no dry vegetation here to fire, no resinous undergrowth. Curiously enough, the bare ground underfoot was hot and steaming as if it were a river bed. Fever laid a heavy hand on the place.

Here was no place to start a jungle fire, Sambo thought. His mind surging with anxiety, he was about to beat a retreat when suddenly the place that had echoed to the apes' rumbles was silent indeed. And Sambo's fears and imaginings became justified all in a tense second. For red eyes were glaring at him; red eyes that moved like lamps in the night.

Sambo felt a horrible frozen sensation running down his spine, and his scalp became prickly. He stayed rooted to the ground where he had halted, staring slowly all round him. Those red eyes were moving on all sides. He was amongst the apes without a single weapon!

There are some experiences that would send a chill of fear to the most reckless and foolhardy men. And Sambo just then could have run screaming with fear. It was those eyes moving in the dark that unnerved him.

He stood crouched with his great fists clenched in the darkness, a mighty figure of a man, but hardly a match for his animal foes. Nearer, larger those red eyes loomed on all sides, and he saw the shambling forms of the spes, their faces creased up horribly in the starlight as they regarded him.

They moved with the slow, lurching gait of tired creatures, their long arms hanging down below their great hairy hips. Sambo was as if hypnotised as they came nearer. He could not move a muscle. He stared in growing horror.

Then, to his amazement, he saw one of the apes marshal its fellows, gesticulate to them and rumble deep in its throat. It was evident the great hairy brute was chief of them, and that he was talking to the apes. Sambo lost a little of his fear in wonder.

The apes shuffled back in obedience to the gestures of their leader. Sambo suddenly felt as if a cord were pulled in his brain—a cord snapping the paralysis that was on him, giving him lively apprehension in its place. For now the solitary ape was advancing on Sambo with its hairy arms swinging up and bending.

Instinctively the black cricketer copied that poise, which was for all the world that of an intelligent fighter in the ring. He understood. The ape intended to engage him in lone combat—a combat of which, it seemed to Sambo, there could only be one result.

Nevertheless, since he was forced to fight, fight he must.

The ape suddenly let forth a snarl that shook the hot, steamy place with its echoes, and with its claws distended, it launched its great weight on Sambo.

Sambo, with the quickness of lightning, slipped to one side. He had a vision of the ape landing grotesquely from its spring in dangerous proximity to him, and Sambo swung his body and his arm in a piledriver punch for that hairy chest.

Thud! The ape gibbered, but seemed little impressed. Whereas Sambo felt the agony of a sprained thumb. So intense was the pain that as the ape sprang at him again he let out a yell, and only just in time dodged, feeling the creature's claws tugging through his curly pate, digging into his skull.

The claw of the beast struck a mere scathing blow, as it happened, and Sambo was lucky. But he felt for a moment as if his head had been tugged away; the blood streamed down his face, and red-hot pains ran through his head.

It sobered him; it sent all his panic fleeing, and brought to him the desperate necessity of fighting

for his life. Bleeding though he was, Sambo had never been cooler in his life as he circled the madly snarling ape.

One blow from those tremendously thick arms, and he knew that his end would come. The ape would be upon his recumbent body, tearing it to bits.

Yet what could he possibly do? The end must come sooner or later. He could not forever dodge this monstrous snarling killer; he could not run away, for the rest of the apes circled the two strangely-matched combatants warily.

Then suddenly, like a film flicker, there came to Sambo a memory. A memory of an old fighter he had once known in his ring days. Curiously, the discussion had been whether an ape and a man could be matched in a boxing contest. Sambo had maintained that the ape would have very much the advantage over the man, but the old fighter had insisted otherwise.

"An ape's got a fatal spot," he had told his audience, circling round in mimicry of the fight he was trying to visualise. "Hit him there—hard." He struck at the air. "See. Reach upwards and hit him just on the windpipe. He'll go out like a snuffed candle, that ape. By golly, I'd like to stage the fight myself."

Sambo had an impulse to streak away from the hairy left arm that stretched out at him, but with a desperate effort he ducked and smashed his fist with the sprained thumb at the arm, pushing it inwards with surprising precision. But a chance of a dash with his right fist to that snarling ape face was lost, and the next moment he found himself retreating as the gibbering animal advanced on him pawing madly.

Then into his bewilderment a strategy came. He foiled with his right and left, and slid away. The ape sprang at him with a *zaf, zaf* that sounded horrible in the tense atmosphere. But Sambo swerved brilliantly right into his hairy chest, and his right flashed out and caught the ape a terrific smash clean on the throat. The ape dropped as if it had been felled with an axe.

It lay there groaning and writhing. In stupefaction Sambo stared at the recumbent brute, trying to fix in his mind the fact that he had won. Then, suddenly, he stared around him. He saw the apes retreating. They evidently went in awful fear.

Sambo retreated step by step, facing the brute. He had an idea that it might spring galvanically upon him at any moment.

But the ape was sulky in its defeat. It slewed its head round at Sambo, growled and made off. And Sambo, on a strange impulse quite uncontrollable—an impulse he could never explain—followed it.

The ape shuffled through the eerie white buildings of the Hidden City towards the trees; and eventually it squatted down in what seemed to be a bowl or crater in the ground. Sambo hiding behind one of the trees and peering out, saw the sulky ape take up a stone axe, evidently captured from one of the natives, and tap with it at the ground.

"Tap, tap, tap!" It was just like a naughty child, destroying something wilfully after it had been chastised. The ape bent its head down and listened at the ground, and Sambo watched wonderingly.

The brute started again, tapping more energetically at the ground now. Now it was picking up pieces of rock and throwing them furiously to one side. Sambo started violently, and a frown settled on his dark brow all of a sudden as he heard an ominous yet mysterious sound—a violent hissing and gurgling from the ground near the ape.

He had a queer foreboding that something was going to happen, that the ape's queer antics had some definite object in view.



THE JUNGLE ERUPTION.—The ape's persistent tapping ceased all at once, and he sprang back, his startled scream rending the air as a jet of hissing liquid sprang from the ground.

And then all at once the ape's persistent tapping ceased, and the brute sprang back, his startled scream rending the air as a jet of hissing liquid sprang from the ground.

High in the air the jet spurted. The ape was rolling away frantically, trying to scramble to his feet. He was a pitiable object, drenched in the boiling matter that had erupted from the earth. Then all at once there was a stentorian sound, like the explosion of massed artillery, and the whole ground seemed to convulse and heave up in one great eruption of liquid, stone and brick.

A flood swept forward like wildfire through the trees, and Sambo ran. He understood now. The savage and inquisitive ape had been tapping some gargantuan oil well in the jungle, and now it was let loose in a scorching flood over the plateau.

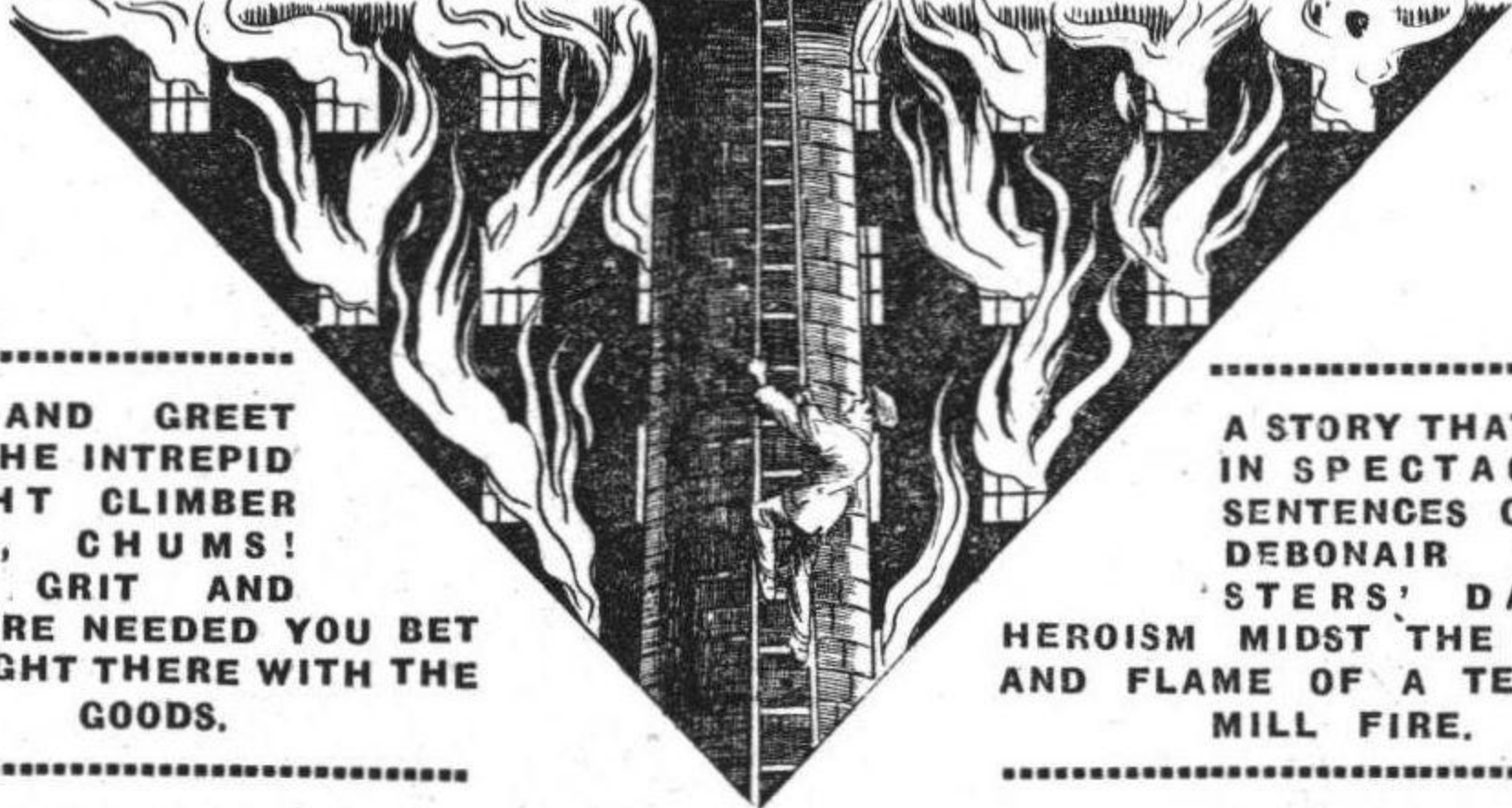
The steamy darkness was rent with the screams and snarls of the apes, and from all directions they came shambling. Sambo was running too—running for dear life. For this was a phenomenon he could not understand.

Of one thing he felt sure; it had come in time either to destroy or save them all.

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THE STEEPLEJACK FIREFIGHTER



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A STORY THAT TELLS IN SPECTACULAR SENTENCES OF TWO DEBONAIR YOUNGSTERS' DARING HEROISM MIDST THE SMOKE AND FLAME OF A TERRIBLE MILL FIRE.

The Mill Fire.

STAN ROGERS heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, that's finished, Podger. We'll get the scaffolding down and pack up. It's been a tough job."

He glanced from the fat, good-natured face of his chum and assistant, Podger McIntosh, to the ground far below the high chimney on which the steeplejacks had been working for the past week. It had been no easy task to repair the great chimney of the Seeton Cotton Mill, and neither was sorry that the job had finished.

"These climbin' jobs wull be the end of me," muttered Podger. "My muscles feel like somebody's been massaging 'em wi' sandpaper."

"You're always grumbling," grinned Stan. "There's too much fat about your muscles, that's all that's—"

He stopped with a startling gasp as his glance strayed towards the high mill building some little distance from the chimney. One of the windows had glowed redly for an instant.

"By gosh!" Stan muttered. "Surely that building's not—"

"Fire! Fire!"

Following the yell came the crashing of glass, and a few seconds later smoke and flame were belching from the smashed window.

Pandemonium broke loose then. A gong sounded in the mill yard, and as the horrified steeplejacks stared aghast at the building, the mill hands began to pour from the doors.

Round the side of the huge square building ran an iron fire escape, and within a few minutes this was crowded with mill hands from the topmost floors. The fire, which had seemed to originate high up in the building, spread with incredible rapidity. In less than three minutes the whole floor seemed to be ablaze.

"Thank goodness!" Stan exclaimed, relievedly. "That was quick work. They've all gained the yard, at any rate."

His gaze went to the roof of the blazing building,

and he tensed suddenly. Crowded at the roof edge were fully a score of mill hands.

"They've been cut off from reaching the escape," gasped Stan. "How— Here's the escape."

Down below, men were rushing forward with the mill fire engine, and Stan and Podger, anxious to lend a hand, raced down the stack. But when they reached the crowd, Stan and Podger were horrified. The escape had been tampered with. The ladders were broken beyond repair. And already the lower part of the building was ablaze. It seemed that the mill hands on the roof top were doomed.

"The Overtown Brigade won't reach here in time," muttered someone in the crowd.

Stan's brain was working swiftly. His gaze took in the high chimney at which he had just been working, and the blazing building. Next instant the young steeplejack was yelling for the longest, strongest rope in the mill.

Within half a minute he was racing up the stack, dragging a great length of thick rope with him. Podger was scarcely a second behind, and as they reached the scaffolding Stan tied a heavy hammer to the end of the rope.

"Now," he muttered, "I'll sling this across. Make this end fast round the chimney, Podger."

Standing at the scaffolding edge, Stan threw the hammer. The roof of the blazing building was ten feet below the scaffolding, and Stan's first throw landed the hammer square on the roof top. Instantly one of the mill hands had rushed forward and seized the rope, knotting it firmly about the coping of the roof. Podger had already secured his end round the chimney. Then, without hesitation, Stan gripped the hemp in his strong hands.

"Look out!" he yelled. "I'm coming across."

Next moment he was going hand over hand across the void. Reaching the roof top, he assembled the mill hands. Some of the men decided to cross themselves, but Stan clearly saw that the half-dozen mill girls would have to be carried across the blazing inferno.

With a mill hand slung across his shoulder, the youngster crossed and re-crossed the thick rope to

the chimney, where Podger relieved him of his burden.

Almost at the point of exhaustion Stan gained the chimney with the last mill hand.

At the very moment that he set foot on the scaffolding the mill floors collapsed in a blazing roar of sparks. Stan's daring rescue had been effected in the very nick of time.

Foul Play.

"PODGER, the manager was right. There's been foul play here!"

It was the morning following the fire, and Stan and his fat chum stood in the gutted mill. The former had just picked up a number of twisted brass caps from the ruins.

"They're off petrol tins, Podger," Stan went on. "There's half a dozen of 'em here. And what's petrol doing in a cotton mill? I'll bet——"

Stan turned swiftly. Two men had entered the ruins. Something in their thin, cunning faces caused Stan to pull Podger aside.



STAN'S DIZZY RESCUE STUNT.—Almost at the point of exhaustion Stan gained the chimney with the last mill hand—just as the mill collapsed midst a shower of sparks.

"Get behind this wall, Podger. We'll see what these birds are after."

Breathlessly the chums watched as the two men began to search among the ruins. Presently one of them straightened up.

"There's nothing here," he muttered. The tins must have been burnt out in the blaze. Sandon, we nearly bungled it. Who'd 'a' thought the thing would blaze up before all the hands got clear? That steeplejack got us out of a nasty mess, I reckon——"

He broke off. Stan, white with anger, had come from behind the wall.

"You thugs!" he roared. "Twenty people might have been burnt to death in that blaze. Get 'em, Podger."

Stan launched himself forward, determined on handing the thugs over to the police. Then he fell back. Like lightning an automatic had appeared in the nearest man's hand, and a snarling command came from him:

"Put 'em up, quick."

Helplessly Stan and Podger raised their hands, and for a few moments the thug surveyed them.

"They've heard what we said, Sandon," he muttered presently. "There's only one thing for it, let the Boss deal with 'em."

Two minutes later the steeplejacks were being forced into a large closed car that stood outside the mill.

* * * * *

FOR half an hour the car sped on, and then came to a halt in a narrow, dirty street in the east end of the city. It was still early morning, and as Stan and Podger were forced out of the car they found the narrow street deserted.

At the pistol point the chums were forced through the doorway of a dirty-looking shop, ostensibly an antique dealer's. A wizened Chinaman came forward, and one of the crooks gave a low command. Instantly the Chinaman raised the top of the counter, revealing a narrow flight of steps.

"Get down."

The crook prodded Stan with his gun, and the steeplejacks were forced below. The steps ended in a wide, well-lit corridor, at the end of which was a large cellar, stone floored, and seated at a long, narrow table were fully a dozen thugs. In the

centre of the room a well-dressed man was smoking a cigar. Stan saw in an instant that it was the Boss. His thin, cruel face and hard eyes were unmistakably those of the swell gangster.

He listened calmly while Sandon explained about Stan and Podger; then he bent a glance on the steeplejacks that sent a shiver snaking along Stan's spine.

"They've seen too much," he said shortly. "We'll let Li Hing deal with 'em. He'll fix 'em." He gave an order, and a few moments later the wizened Chinaman entered the cellar.

His yellow face contorted into a di-

bolical grin as he stared at the two lads.

"Me fix them," he chuckled. "Wait."

He disappeared up the narrow flight of stairs leading to his shop above, and when he returned he was carrying the queerest thing Stan had ever seen. It was a circular piece of wood, fully two feet across, and from its underside twelve huge curved blades hung point downwards. Both edges of the blades were razor sharp, and on the topmost side of the piece of wood was a long, narrow steel rod.

Climbing on to the table, the Chink fixed the weird contraption on to a hook in the ceiling. Then with a deft movement he swung the circular board round like a roulette wheel. And instantly Stan saw. It was nothing more than a devilish instrument of torture conceived in the Chinese brain.

The board, with the knives hanging downwards, swung round at a terrific speed, noiselessly, easily, showing that the diabolical contraption was perfectly balanced.

"The death top," chuckled Li Hing. "It swings round and round for half an hour an' no stop. Me



A DEMONIAICAL TORTURE TRAP.—Reaching up, Li Hing set the death top spinning. "When they grow tired they fall forward and knives chop their heads off," he chuckled. Podger and Stan remained rigid, motionless.

put this over their heads an' if they move—poof, theil noses go."

The thugs roared with laughter. Li Hing seized Stan and Podger and, stopping the whirling board, thrust them beneath the death top until the hanging knives were circling their heads.

With a chuckle he passed a rope round the two lads, leaving their hands free. Then, reaching up, the Chinaman set the board spinning.

"They no move now for half an hour," chuckled Li Hing. "Then I spin top again. When they grow tired they fall forward, see, an' their heads chop off."

The Boss grinned.

"That's the way to deal with 'em," he said. "They'll not interfere with our next job. Come on, we've got the Redfort Mill to fix."

The thugs rose to their feet and filed from the cellar, leaving Stan and Podger alone, rigid and motionless.

The Knife Top.

"GOSH, Podger, we're in a fix. Can't you think of something?"

Stan spoke softly, the whirling knife blades scarcely an inch before his face.

"Think o' somethin'," came Podger's voice. "There's one thing I can think of, an' that's we're in the worst fix we've ever been in. Yon Chink must sartinly ha'e been an expert torturer in China."

Stan broke in. A sudden idee had come to him. "Podger," he said softly, "we've got to play up to this Chink. He'll be here in half an hour to start her up again, and when he comes we've got to be on

the point of exhaustion. Leave the rest to me, an' don't move, or your nose will have finished being any use to you."

Patiently the chums waited, standing almost rigid. The slightest movement was liable to send either one or the other of them into those revolving knives. It soon became clear that the torture was fiendish, for the pain of standing still was certain to make them move sooner or later, and then the knives would do their deadly work.

To keep their thoughts from the danger, the chums kept up a low conversation. Suddenly a movement from above sent Stan tense. The Chinaman was coming down into the cellar.

"Leave it to me, Podger. I'm going to get this Chink, get him good and hard."

Li Hing came softly into the cellar, his almond eyes aglow.

"You white dogs had 'nough?" he grinned. "Another turn now 'nough to feenish you. Savee?"

He stared at the steeplejacks, who were obviously on the point of exhaustion from the strain of standing still. Stan's eyes were half-closed.

Grinning, Li Hing reached up and stopped the now slowly revolving board. Then he prepared to twist it round again. And in that fraction of a second Stan acted. His right foot came up in a fierce kick. The toe of his boot caught the Chink just below the knee-cap, sending him crashing across the cellar with a howl of pain.

"Now, Podger, quickly does it."

Together the chums slowly bent their knees. The knives, now motionless, grazed both their faces, and then, with one quick movement, they were free. An instant's work, and Stan had loosed the rope which bound them. Then he dived for the Chink.

Li Hing by this time was nothing more than a yellow cringing bundle of fear. But without hesitation Stan dragged him to his feet.

"Now," he demanded, "what's the game with that gang? Where've they gone?"

"They set 'nother mill on fire," babbled Li Hing. "Redfort Mill. They fix it up this morning."

"Redfort Mill," gasped Stan. "Why, that's the biggest cotton mill in the town. The hounds! Come on, Podger!"

"Haul on." Podger indicated the Chink. "Gie him a taste of his own medicine. It'll keep him frae following us."

Ignoring the Chink's frightened yell, the chums quickly fixed him beneath the knives, and Stan set them revolving swiftly.

"Now, you yellow rat," he grinned, "see how you like it. Just wait till we get the Boss."

* * * * *

"YOU can bet your life the thugs have an accomplice in the mill, whose job it is to set the stuff alight. I reckon the Boss and his gang are merely on hand to see that everything goes along all right."

Stan stared up at the great mill building as he spoke. The chums were safely hidden in the engine-house of the Redfort Mill, and back of them were fully a dozen policemen. They had listened incredulously to Stan's story, but the inspector had decided that there might be something in it, and had detailed a posse of policemen to accompany the steeplejacks.

As the chums watched, the mill workers began to pour in through the wide gates, and of a sudden, a gasp escaped Stan. For, walking through the gates, as though to commence work, was Sandon. With him were three of the thugs he had seen in the cellar.

"Well, I'm dashed. No wonder that last mill

(Continued on page 36.)

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"Thank Heaven, Clarence—you have saved all our lives," panted the Professor, as he came up to the dizzy Sir Bags. "One minute longer, and all our oxygen would have been of no avail. The mad fool—the insane lunatic!"

"Don't talk about him any longer, Prof!" said Bags huskily. "He's paid for all his misdeeds now—he's gone! Gad! To think of him now—falling through space. He's still falling! Perhaps he'll go on falling for eternity!"

AS for the rest, there is little to be told.

After many hours of hard, continuous work, Professor Drewe and his engineers succeeded in repairing the damage that Count Popandos had caused. And then the *Solar Rover* continued her voyage through space—and, ultimately, the earth had loomed larger and larger. The one great anxiety was now at an end.

They had all feared that they would never be able to locate the earth again—but no—Professor Drewe's uncanny skill was triumphant, and the earth grew nearer and nearer.

During these days, Barry Drewe and his companions found themselves with very little to do, and the voyage seemed tame and monotonous after the marvellous adventures on Venus. But then, there was the prospect of returning to earth again, with

THE SLEEPY JACK FIREFIGHTER—

(Continued from page 34.)

went off so quickly. These thugs, disguised as mill hands, must have fired the mill in about a dozen places at once. They'd easily pass themselves off as new workmen in this crush."

Five minutes passed, and then the sergeant gave the signal. Quickly the posse of policemen entered the mill. There was no mistake. The thugs, in every instance, were located in rooms where the cotton was stored, waiting for the signal to spill the petrol tin each man carried.

Stan and Podger came upon their man in the very act of spilling petrol over a mass of cotton. The fellow wore a muffler and cap; but one glance at his eyes sent Stan diving forward. It was the Boss.

"At him, Podger. This is the bird we want."

Stan hurled himself forward, and the Boss turned quickly. A revolver leaped to his hand like magic.

"Back," he roared, "or I'll riddle you." Stan never hesitated. Diving low for the crook's knees, he sent the Boss crashing. The crook raised the revolver again, juggling it steadily at Stan from the floor.

"You're finished!" he barked. "I'll make no mistake this time."

His finger curved about the trigger, and in that instant, Stan faced death. Then something hurtled through the air between Stan and the crook. Podger had raised a great ball of cotton and thrown it bodily at the crook.

The bullet plugged harmlessly into the ball, and then the great mass crashed full across the Boss, blocking his aim. Before he could move, the chums had followed up their advantage, and in a trice the crook was helpless.

A few hours later Stan was listening to the police inspector's explanation of the attempts on the mill.

"They're insurance frauds. This crook, the Boss, has managed to get hold of insurance on both these big mills. But"—the inspector smiled—"I guess when he tackled you boys he made a slight mistake."

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