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Boys' 2D EVERY SATURDAY Magazine



BANDITS OF BIG BEN

**FEATURING FALCON SWIFT
THE SPORTING DEFECTIVE**

VOL. XXII—No. 575—March 11, 1933

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BY CANADIAN MAGAZINE POST.

THE JESTER'S REALM

Footballs and Fountain Pens awarded to senders of all jokes printed here. Send your favourite jokes on p.c., with coupon on this page to the Joke Editor, "Boys' Magazine," 196, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.



Warder: Aren't you asleep yet?
Ex-burglar: No! It seems so funny to be lyin' in bed in the middle of the night!

(Football to IAN LOW, Sans Souci, St. David's Road, Llandudno, North Wales.)

JOKE COUPON.

Stick on postcard and send with your favourite joke to the JOKE EDITOR.

11/3/33

IN THE DARK.

POLICEMAN (spotting Tommy in a forbidden field): Hi, sonny, do you see what it says on that notice?

TOMMY: Sorry, sir, I can't read in the day-time, I was educated at a night school.

(Fountain pen to BERNARD STANSBIE, 33, Spring Hill, Chasetown, Nr. Walsall, Staffs.)

HIS MATE.

CHARLIE THE CRACKSMAN: Listen, Bill! Who's that?

BILL: Nobody!

CHARLIE: Well, there's somebody with him!

(Fountain pen to JOE HARDWICK, 15, Lee's Buildings, Hollingwood, Chesterfield.)

A SHORTAGE.

OLD GENT (at the Zoo): Is that a man-eating lion?

FED-UP KEEPER: Yes, sir, but we're short of men this week, so all he gets is beef!

(Fountain pen to J. ORR, 28, Harlesden Rd., Willesden Green, London, N.W.10.)

NOT TIDE DOWN.

JOHNNY: Jimmy, do you know why swans have long necks?

JIMMY: To keep them from drowning at high tide, of course!

(Fountain pen to CHARLES OWENS, 22, Bishopton Road, Bearwood, Smethwick.)

ON HIS UPPERS.

A thrifty old Scotsman named Shield Found a pair of old spats in a field.

'Tis said that he went To a cobbling gent,

And said "Please have these well soled and heeled."

(Fountain pen to GORDON WESTLAKE, 6, Sutton Road, Heston, Hounslow.)

BACK CHAT.

JOE: Where be you going, Jarge?

JARGE: I bain't goin' nowhere!

JOE: 'Course you be!

JARGE: No I bain't! I be coming back!

(Fountain pen to KENNETH BATTEN, 17, York Buildings, Timbrel Street, Trowbridge, Wilts.)

SEA-SICKNESS.

TEACHER: TOMMY, what do you know about the Dead Sea?

TOMMY: Please, sir, I didn't even know it had been ill!

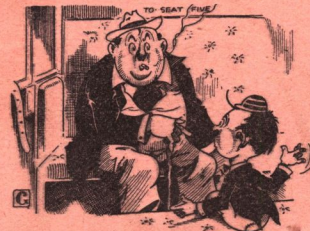
(Fountain pen to JAMES BURROWS, "Hildene," James Lane, Prescot, Lances.)

THE ROOT OF IT.

TEACHER: What is the particular process in nature that causes rain?

BOY: Father's corns, sir!

(Fountain pen to TAN KHIANG KHOO, 57, Cairnhill Road, Singapore, S.S.)



Very Fat Gent (sitting opposite small boy in railway carriage): What are you staring at, my boy?

Boy: Please, sir, there isn't anywhere else to look!

(Football to J. K. WINTERBOTTOM, 2, Abbey Gardens, Birkdale, Southport.)

THE MONOCLED MANHUNTER VERSUS THE COMRADES OF CRIME. A Breathless Complete Detective Drama Played Out Against the Dizzy Background of The King of Clocks.

THE BANDITS OF BIG BEN

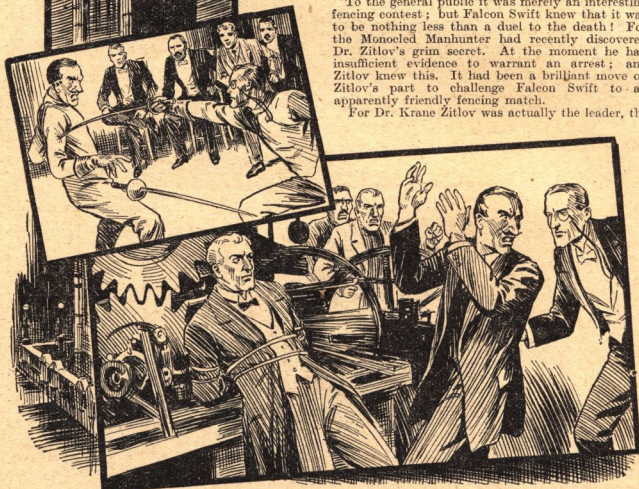
It's a Falcon Swift Yarn, Chums—So It's Bound to Keep You Thrilled!

"GOOD luck, Boss!" said Chick Conway.
"Thanks, laddie," replied Falcon Swift, the celebrated sporting sleuth. "But luck won't serve me in this fight. The victory will go to the more skilful man."

The match promised to be a brilliant one; for Dr. Crane Zitlov, the champion of Europe, had challenged Falcon Swift, the sporting detective, to a duel with foils at the Big Hall of the Central Fencing Academy.

To the general public it was merely an interesting fencing contest; but Falcon Swift knew that it was to be nothing less than a duel to the death! For the Monocled Manhunter had recently discovered Dr. Zitlov's grim secret. At the moment he had insufficient evidence to warrant an arrest; and Zitlov knew this. It had been a brilliant move on Zitlov's part to challenge Falcon Swift to an apparently friendly fencing match.

For Dr. Crane Zitlov was actually the leader, the



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

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brain of the Comrades of Crime—the most ruthless, murderous confederation of criminals in Europe. Zitlov was aiming to kill Falcon Swift by "accident"; and the sporting sleuth was well aware of his danger. Like the great sportsman he was, however, he had accepted the challenge with enthusiasm, for he was an expert with the foils, and he had ample confidence in his own prowess.

The two combatants faced each other calmly, both of them attired in the usual fencing kit. They were wearing no protective masks, however, although the points of their keen-bladed weapons were protected by the regulation buttons.

Dr. Zitlov was a heavily built man, but nimble for all that; his face was dark, with his sleek, black hair brushed straight back from his forehead. A man about forty-five, he had the appearance of a university professor. His eyes, piercing black, were full of mockery as he gazed into the calm, immobile countenance of his adversary. Falcon Swift, monocle in eye, imperturbable, returned look for look.

"So!" said Dr. Zitlov softly. "We meet in mortal combat, Mr. Swift."

"May the better man win," said Falcon Swift politely.

"The better man, my friend, *will* win!" retorted the other. "You enjoy, I believe, some reputation as an athlete, as an exponent of various sports. But you were rash, indeed, to accept my challenge."

"Yet rashness has never been one of my failings," said Falcon Swift calmly.

They parted, saluted each other and took up the on-guard position. Falcon Swift commenced warily, resolving to wait—to let Zitlov, the champion, open the play. Thus the detective would have an opportunity of measuring his opponent's power.

There were some preliminary passes from the first engagement in the lines of tierce, each man playing for an opening. Neither of them would give ground nor betray haste. During one moment, Zitlov's blade would slither along Falcon Swift's with a ceaseless tremor; the eyes of the two men would meet, and with knees bent Zitlov would crouch, like an animal making ready for a spring.

Suddenly, there was a change. Like lightning Zitlov disengaged; he darted under Falcon Swift's guard, then over it, back and under again, finally stretching out in the lunge. His double feint was completed; he straightened his arm to drive home the *botte*.

Falcon Swift laughed. With a flying point he cleared Zitlov's blade out of the line of his body. There was the sound of ringing metal as the weapons met. Now Zitlov stood at his full stretch, half of his

steel past and beyond Falcon Swift. For a fraction of a second the champion was completely at Falcon Swift's mercy.

Pale to the lips, Zitlov waited for this thrust, but Falcon Swift laughed lightly, and he refrained from using his blade. The next moment Zitlov had recovered, and the combatants were back in their original positions.

Chick Conway was watching breathlessly. He scarcely paid any attention to the murmurs of applause which had gone up. He knew that his beloved Boss had just spared Zitlov; and Chick gloated inwardly. As he had known from the start, Falcon Swift was Zitlov's master.

Falcon Swift himself did not doubt that the button on Zitlov's sword was a fake. It had been genuine enough when examined; but the detective believed that his enemy had made a substitution. At the right moment—when Zitlov gained his opportunity—the point of his sword would deliver its death thrust.

Zitlov was not aware of Falcon Swift's brilliance; he appeared to think that the detective had clumsily failed to take advantage of his superior position. Now he pressed hard. Imperturbable as ever, Falcon Swift turned aside a vicious thrust with a close parry. While in the act of encircling Zitlov's blade, he attempted, by pressure, to carry the weapon out of his hand. But by skilful work, Zitlov avoided the disaster.

Suddenly, Falcon Swift attacked, driving the other hard. If he had been determined to take Zitlov's life, he could have made short work of him. But he only desired to frustrate the master-crook's evil design.

Falcon Swift's attack lured Zitlov on. In another moment the arch-crook was making a riposte; his blade twisted round the sporting sleuth's, and went slithering wickedly at the detective.

Like a flash, Falcon Swift carried the blade off by encircling it, and again the detective exerted pressure in order to disarm his adversary. But Zitlov laughed with contempt, and with a quick lunge he disengaged, his point snaked upwards at Falcon Swift's throat. And the Monocled Manhunter knew that if the thrust reached home it would be his death. Deftly he parried, and only in the nick of time did he save himself.

In that moment the detective saw his chance. Zitlov's point was held low as he watched his opponent; so low that his arm was uncovered, and Falcon Swift's point was in line with it.

In a flash of lightning-like action, the Monocled Manhunter straightened his elbow, his blade shot

out in a brilliant stroke, and the buttoned point struck Zitlov's sword-arm.

Zitlov's blade went spinning, and Falcon Swift stood back, a smile on his lips. The contest was over. Zitlov was disarmed and at Falcon Swift's mercy.

"Fool!" snarled Zitlov, as Falcon Swift came near. "You escape me now—but I will get you—and that soon!"

They scarcely noticed the applause. All those people who had been looking on were still under the impression that the contest had been purely friendly; and there was much enthusiasm.

Even while the Sporting Sleuth was dressing, Dr. Zitlov was at the telephone. The Supreme Chief of the Comrades of Crime was pale with alarm; for he had not failed to notice the grim, mocking light in Falcon Swift's eyes.

"Yes?" he said, as a voice sounded over the wire. "You are ready, X20?"

"What are your orders, Chief?" came the reply—and both were speaking in a little-known Slavonic dialect.

"Take three Comrades with you," commanded Dr. Krane Zitlov. "Wait for Falcon Swift and his boy. Follow them to their rooms. Get them both. You understand? *Get them!*"

When Falcon Swift, perfectly immaculate, left the

streets, four men, apparently respectable citizens, followed. They were X20 and three other expert gunmen of the Comrades of Crime.

Arriving at their chambers, Falcon Swift and Chick entered the consulting room. On the instant, the Monocled Manhunter burst into grim, determined action.

"Sit here, Chick—quick!" he commanded, hastily removing his jacket and donning his dressing-gown.

He indicated a chair, and Chick sat down, wondering. Falcon Swift himself took a seat at his desk; and at the same moment he touched a button. There was a *click* and something almost invisible shot upwards from the other side of the desk.

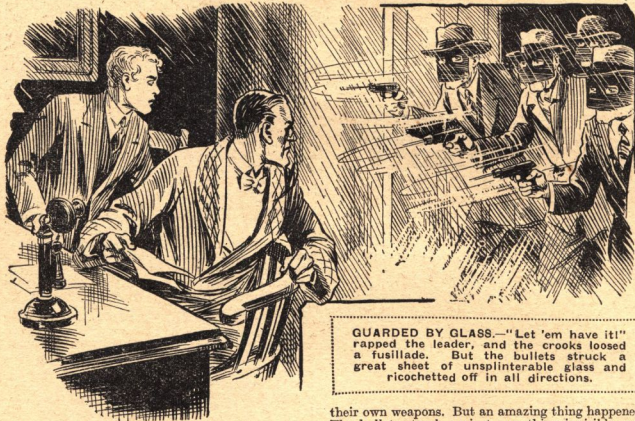
"Boss!" whispered Chick. "You don't think—"

"No, I don't think—I *know*," interrupted Falcon Swift. "Four men were following us, Chick, and they mean mischief. Well, we are ready for them."

Even as he spoke the door burst open. X20 and his three companions strode smartly in; black masks, entirely covering their faces, had been pulled down like blinds from their hats. Each man held a gleaming, silenced automatic.

"Let 'em have it!" snapped X20.

Thud-thud! Thud-thud! Thud-thud! A wicked fusillade of bullets sped unerringly towards Falcon Swift and Chick—before either of them could draw



GUARDED BY GLASS.—"Let 'em have it!" rapped the leader, and the crooks loosed a fusillade. But the bullets struck a great sheet of unshatterable glass and ricocheted off in all directions.

Fencing Academy with Chick Conway, he was grimly amused.

"A singularly interesting enemy, Chick," commented the Monocled Manhunter. "He is determined to take my life—before I can obtain the necessary evidence to expose him."

"Are you sure he is the head of the Comrades of Crime, boss?" asked Chick. "I mean, he's a famous scientist on the Continent. His reputation is good."

"All such master-criminals are men of high repute—until they are found out," retorted Falcon Swift. "Make no mistake, laddie; either I get Zitlov, or he gets me."

As the famous pair walked through the West End

their own weapons. But an amazing thing happened. The bullets struck against something invisible, and they ricocheted off in all directions, to the utter consternation of the crooks. From where they stood it was impossible to detect the great sheet of invisible, unshatterable glass which stood between them and their intended victims. It had risen automatically from the desk, at Falcon Swift's touch.

"You are very kind, my friends!" said Falcon Swift urbanely. "I am obliged to you for walking so neatly into the trap!"

Click! He touched another button, and, to the fury of the masked men, a steel net of fine mesh dropped over them from above. In a moment they were floundering on the floor. The net automatically became tight, and the capture was complete

The Chair Of Secrets.

THE screen of invisible glass dropped back into its hidden receptacle, and Falcon Swift moved briskly across the consulting room. He was taking no chances with the Comrades of Crime, and his first action was to pick up an object which looked like a scent spray. Holding a handkerchief over his mouth and nose, he pressed the bulb and a little cloud of vapour hissed round the heads of the enmeshed men. The four succumbed at once, temporarily unconscious.

Falcon Swift waited for a few minutes, until the vapour dissipated. Then he and Chick released the prisoners from the steel net. They were disarmed, and handcuffs were snapped on the wrists of them all.

"What's the next thing, boss?" asked Chick. "Are you going to ring up the Yard?" "Presently," replied Falcon Swift. "But before I hand these men over to the police, I have a mind to try a little experiment—with Mr. Raynor's invention."

When the prisoners came to their senses, a few minutes later, two of them were sitting side by side on a lounge, and Chick Conway, gun in hand, was watching over them.

Another man was reclining in a comfortable easy chair. The fourth, however, had been placed in a chair of extraordinary aspect. It was a massive thing of gleaming metal, and the man's arms were manacled to the chair itself, one on either arm. His legs were clamped to the chair front.

Chick! Falcon Swift touched a switch, and instantly, the "spokes" of the chair arms, which had looked like silver tubes, glowed with a vivid, vermilion fire. The "spokes" were apparently, high-powered valves, like those of a radio set, only much longer. Along the back of the chair more lamps glowed, making a most impressive spectacle. The man who was imprisoned in the chair, now fully conscious and the mask removed from his face, looked pale with fright.

"Have no fear," said the Monocled Manhunter, noting the man's terror. "This is not a Death Chair—although it may look alarming."

The other men, in spite of their mortification at being captured, were intensely interested in the plight of their comrade.

"Let me explain," said Falcon Swift smoothly. "A gentleman of brilliant scientific skill has invented what he calls a 'Thought Reading Chair.' Any man who sits in the chair automatically records his thoughts upon a hidden steel tape. It is an adaptation of the Blattnerphone system."

The imprisoned man turned deathly pale.

"Bah! You try to trick me!" he gritted, with a foreign accent. "My thoughts, they cannot be recorded."

"We shall see," said the Sporting Sleuth imperturbably.

He touched the switch again, and the vermilion light became more brilliant. A faint, vibrant hum filled the great detective's consulting room. The man in the chair, with beads of perspiration standing out upon his forehead, sat rigid. It was obvious that he was striving hard to control his thoughts—to make his mind a blank. The other men watched fascinatedly, their expressions eloquent of their inward alarm.

"You will understand that this is just an experiment," said Falcon Swift. "The inventor of the chair requested me to instal it in my room, believing that I might use it to read the thoughts of my clients. But I much prefer to read the thoughts of crooks."

He said no more, but sat down, facing his prisoners.

He, too, held a gun, and the two sleuths watched silently over the crooks. The tension increased. It became well-nigh unbearable as the minutes ticked away.

Five minutes . . . ten . . . fifteen . . . "Let me go—let me go!" almost screamed the man in the chair. "This is torture!"

"The imagination of mankind is a wonderful thing!" snapped Falcon Swift, as he pressed the switch, and the valves died out. "My friend, you have been tricked. This chair is a mere fake. Your thoughts are not worth reading, since you are on your guard. But the thoughts of your companion, here, might be interesting."

He turned abruptly upon the man who was sitting in the comfortable-looking chair. With a swift, powerful heave, the detective yanked him out, and he carefully ordered Chick Conway to keep the fellow at bay. Then the Monocled Manhunter touched the padded back of the chair, and a section of it swung open.

In the cavity that was revealed gleamed a mass of intricate mechanism. This innocent-looking easy-chair was the real "thought-reader!"

Swift touched a switch, and, instantly, part of the mechanism was set in motion. A voice, thick and unnatural, sounded:

"Paul must be careful with his thoughts," said the mechanical voice. "If he thinks of the big meeting at the Chief's Headquarters, it will be fatal . . . No. 29, Delson Square . . . Paul must not think of that address . . . if he does, that infernal chair might record his thoughts . . . No. 29, Delson Square . . . curse it, why do I keep thinking of the meeting . . . if Paul is doing the same our organisation will be smashed . . . No. 29, Delson Square . . . No. 29, Delson Square . . . the meeting is going on now, with the Chief in the chair . . . he thinks that Swift is dead by now . . . curse Swift and his tricks! If it wasn't for this boy and the gun I'd make a break for it . . ."

"No, no!" screamed the man who had lately occupied the chair. "This is black magic! You devil! The Chief will get you for this—"

"Unless I get the Chief first!" snapped Falcon Swift, as he switched off the apparatus. "My friend's invention appears to be extraordinarily efficient."

The detective went to the telephone.

"Keep these men covered, Chick," he commanded, "if either of them makes the slightest move, shoot."

A moment later Falcon Swift was through to Scotland Yard, asking for a large contingent of the Flying Squad—and such a request from Falcon Swift was never refused.

Half-an-hour later, when the four members of the Comrades of Crime were safe behind prison bars, a scientific raid, with Falcon Swift in full command, was carried out on No. 29, Delson Square.

A cordon was flung round the house; the Flying Squad men attacked strongly. In that respectable-looking house a full meeting of the Comrades of Crime was in progress. A desperate fight developed, there was much shooting, and many of the Flying Squad men were wounded. Two were killed. Falcon Swift himself came near to death when the crooks turned the muzzle of a machine-gun in his direction.

In the midst of all the excitement an astonishing figure made a burst for liberty—a man attired from head to foot in gleaming metal. It was Dr. Krane Zitlov himself, and with bullets spattering against his armour, he made a rush from the house, leapt into one of the police cars, and drove off.

But, thanks to Falcon Swift's brilliant activities, a full dozen of the Comrades of Crime were rounded up, and most of them proved to be badly wanted

men—bandits of the worst type, some of them murderers.

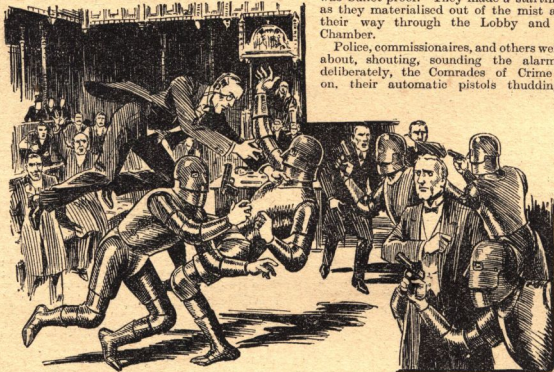
Only a few days after the police-court proceedings the prisoners were put on trial in a special session of the Old Bailey. The whole affair, of course, had created a tremendous sensation in the newspapers.

Sixteen men, all told, were tried. They were "Zone Commanders" of the Confederation, and their arrest meant that the whole organisation was wrecked. They were men who had led gangs of bandits in all parts of the country. Eight of them were found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Four

THE raid was timed to the minute, and executed with brilliant generalship. The many police, who were on duty in and about the House of Commons, were taken so completely by surprise that the mischief was done almost before they realised the meaning of it.

Thud-thud! Thud-thud! Ruthlessly, relentlessly, the Comrades of Crime forced their way into the House. Every man was clad in gleaming, shimmering armour, just as Dr. Zitlov himself had been when he had escaped earlier. The heads of the crooks were encased in armour, too, and the glass of their visors was bullet-proof. They made a startling picture as they materialised out of the mist and forced their way through the Lobby and into the Chamber.

Police, commissioners, and others were running about, shouting, sounding the alarm. Coolly, deliberately, the Comrades of Crime marched on, their automatic pistols thudding grimly,



CHAOS IN THE COMMONS.—Without hesitation Falcon Swift hoisted himself over the barrier and leaped from the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons on to the armour-clad crooks.

Others were sent to penal servitude for ten years; the remainder received lesser sentences.

Falcon Swift was in court, for he was required to give evidence. After the sentences, notice of appeal was given, and some days later the appeal was heard—and dismissed.

Then, owing to the great stir the case had caused, it was announced that Sir Alfred Mansell, the Home Secretary, would make a statement in the House of Commons.

Falcon Swift made a point of being in the Strangers' Gallery that evening, for the Sporting Sleuth had a shrewd suspicion that there might be sensational developments.

Just how right Falcon Swift was was proved by the fact that Zitlov himself, with a dozen picked members of the Comrades of Crime, waited in the neighbourhood of Westminster. Mist, rolling in from the river, masked the movements of the crooks.

"We are ready?" asked Zitlov grimly. "It is nearing the time."

"We but await your orders, Chief," said one of the others.

"It is well," said Zitlov sharply. "We go! To-night the Comrades of Crime will show the world that they are the masters!"

dropping men who made the slightest attempt at resistance.

At the very moment when the crooks forced their way into the Chamber, Sir Alfred Mansell, the Home Secretary, was addressing the House.

"I have given this matter most careful consideration," he was saying, in tones of the utmost gravity. "The eight men who are under sentence of death must hang. There is no justification whatever for granting a reprieve—"

He broke off as a commotion sounded. Members turned their heads, scandalised. Then shouts arose, for the armoured crooks were marching in, in a startling, terrifying body.

"Keep your seats, everybody!" commanded the leader of the intruders. "All who resist will be shot."

"Zitlov!" muttered Falcon Swift.

He had recognised the voice at the first word. The Comrades of Crime, marching straight across the floor of the House, surrounded the amazed Home Secretary.

Falcon Swift acted with characteristic coolness and speed, however. Without hesitation he hoisted his athletic figure over the barrier, and dropped like a stone from the Strangers' Gallery—right upon the

Special to Boys' Mag. League Members

THE CHIEF'S CHAT

And Redskin Leaguers Own Page.

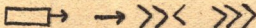
HAIL BRAVES,

The Chief of our Redskin League calling—after a long silence. With the approach of the summer, however, I hope to give you a regular page of hints in the *Mag.* The real reason for writing you this week is to

pass on the following information sent in by Brave V. Lander, of Birmingham, to whom I have sent a special prize.



Above are some feather signs of the Hidstatu Tribe. A feather with black spot shows that the wearer has killed. A notch with its sides blackened denotes that an enemy's scalp was taken. A feather with horse hair attached signifies that the wearer was first to kill in an attack. Top cut off feather and edge blackened—throat cut only. A split feather indicates many wounds.



The above trail signs mean respectively: A message is hidden in the direction of arrow; Go this Way; War; and Peace.

Indian Signs for the months or moons.

☾ Snow Moon, January.	☾ Thunder Moon, July.
✕ Hunger Moon, February.	☽ Corn Moon, August.
☽ Crow Moon, March.	☽ Hunting Moon, September.
☽ Grass Moon, April.	☽ Leaf-falling Moon, October.
☽ Planting Moon, May.	☽ Mad Moon, November.
☽ Rose Moon, June.	☽ Long Night Moon, December.



These are sign talk. Meaning: At Home; Out; Man; Shelter over there; Hunting; Fishing; Trail or Footpath; yes; no.

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BOYS' MAGAZINE LEAGUE

COUPON.

Boys' Magazine, 11/3/33.

shoulders of two of the crooks. His object was to create a diversion, so that the Home Secretary would have a chance of escape. At any second help would arrive.

"You!" hissed a voice in Falcon Swift's ear, as the detective leapt to his feet.

He found himself staring through the glass visor of one of the helmets, straight into the eyes of Dr. Krane Zitlov. And it was at that second that every light in the House snapped out.

Crash! Something struck Falcon Swift hard on the back of his head, and he pitched forward, unconscious. Pandemonium reigned. Members were shouting loudly, police officers were forcing their way in.

Swish-swooooooosh! In various parts of the chamber gas-bombs exploded with startling effect. The fumes spread in all directions. People fell on every side; police officers, crowding through the doorway, were met by the gas wave and beaten back. The Comrades of Crime, protected by their helmets, were unaffected. They worked coolly, deliberately.

It seemed an age before the frantic engineers succeeded in restoring the lights. As a matter of fact, only a few minutes had elapsed. The scene, now revealed, was staggering. M.P.'s were strewn, unconscious, in every part of the Chamber. The Home Secretary had vanished—and so had Falcon Swift. Not a sign of the crooks remained.

The hue and cry which followed was the most sensational on record. Flying Squad officers came tearing across from Scotland Yard, near by; the Houses of Parliament were surrounded; the River Police became active. But no matter where the search spread, the crooks were lost. They had vanished as though into thin air.

Little did the police realise that the Comrades of Crime were on the premises—actually within the great clock tower of Big Ben itself!

For many days Dr. Zitlov had had his spies at work, and he knew every inch of the ground—every stairway, every room. And while the police combed London, the daring criminals carried on with their audacious plan.

WHEN Falcon Swift came to his senses he found himself in darkness. He soon had his wits about him, and he was relieved to find that his limbs had not been bound. No doubt the enemy had taken it for granted that he would be unconscious for a considerable time longer. But the celebrated Monocled Manhunter was in perfect condition, and was capable of quickly recovering from hard knocks.

Although he had been deprived of his automatic, he found that he still possessed his electric torch; and, switching this on, he made the discovery that he was in a small, bare room. It was quite empty, and the door was securely locked.

While he was still wondering, the deep booming notes of a great bell reverberated through the apartment. In a flash Falcon Swift knew the truth. He was actually within the great Clock Tower of Big Ben!

As a matter of fact, he was high up in the Tower, in an empty room immediately beneath a small room which contained the gas and electricity meters.

Since there was no exit by means of the door, Falcon Swift gave his full attention to the narrow, slit-like windows. He succeeded in opening one, and found himself gazing down into a sea of murk and mist. He could hear the dull rumble of traffic as it passed over Westminster Bridge, but he could see nothing, owing to the mist. Overhead glowed the illuminated dial of the great clock.

The detective took a big chance. Firmly gripping the ornamental stonework, he wormed his way upwards. Foot by foot he mounted until, at length, he was actually clinging to the clock face of Big Ben.

But the light from the interior served him ill—for it enabled the enemy to detect his movements. Two men were perched just outside the belfry—within which was housed Big-Ben itself—an enormous bell weighing thirteen-and-a-half tons. Here, too, were the quarter-bells.

Suddenly, a looped rope came hissing out of the upper darkness. It curled itself round Falcon Swift's neck, and only in the nick of time did he fling a hand up, so that his throat was protected. The next moment the rope became taut, and the detective was rapidly hoisted upwards, across the face of the clock to the wide balcony.

"Swift!" muttered one of the crooks. "We advised the Chief to kill him out of hand! He's dangerous. We'd better take him straight to the Chief and let him get rid of the dog at once!"

At that very moment Dr. Zitlov himself was standing in the great Clock Room. Some of his gangsters were about him, and in the corners were three or four bound and gagged men. These were officials who had been taken by surprise, and rendered helpless.

The Clock Room was a wonderful apartment, with the massive, intricate machinery of the great clock, occupying the centre of the great space. There were enormous cogs, wheels and festoons of machinery.

Tied securely, with his back to a part of this machinery, was Sir Alfred Mansell. The unfortunate Cabinet Minister was pale to the lips, but his expression was one of grim stubbornness.

"It is your only chance, Sir Alfred!" Dr. Zitlov was saying. "Either you sign this paper, authorising the immediate release of the sixteen prisoners, or



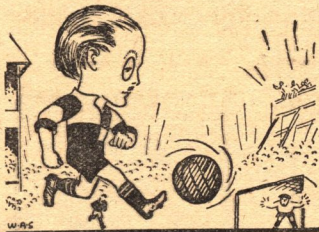
TAKING THE BIG DROP.—A beam of light suddenly shone down the shaft. Promptly Falcon Swift dropped from the weight into the dark depths below.

there will be another Gunpowder Plot at Westminster—and one which will startle the entire world."

"You are mad!" said the Home Secretary tensely. "Never will I sign a reprieve for members of your murderous gang. I have my duty to the country to remember—"

"Is it better for these men to go free, or for half the members of the House of Commons to die?" broke in Zitlov evilly. "But I will not press you unduly, Sir Alfred. I will give you time to think this matter over."

He turned, chuckling with fiendish delight, and



When the forwards get the ball
Nearly time—score one all—
Hearty cries of.....

Sharp's the word
and
Sharp's the Toffee
I like best of all

spoke to his men in a Slav tongue. Before they could carry out his orders one of the doors opened, and Falcon Swift was forced in, his hands bound behind him, a gun at his back.

"What is this?" snarled Zitlov.

He was quickly told of the circumstances of Falcon Swift's escape.

"You have made a grave mistake, Mr. Swift!" said Zitlov, leering into the Monocled Manhunter's calm, immobile face. "So you thought to escape, yes? Well, I will give you a little entertainment."

He gave further orders, and a great trap-door was opened. Yawning beneath was the black shaft in which hung the pendulum of the clock, and the giant weights. Falcon Swift was securely bound to the thick rod of the pendulum, and then allowed to slide down. The "bob" on the pendulum, weighing four hundredweights, checked him, and then he swung relentlessly to and fro as the pendulum operated.

Some of the crooks had wound one of the weights nearly to the top—and in such a position that Sir Alfred Mansell could be sat upon it, and bound helplessly to the steel cable.

"What is the meaning of all this sensational nonsense?" panted the Home Secretary.

"Let me explain," said Zitlov, malignantly. "There are three weights in this shaft, two great weights and a smaller one. Attached to the second great weight is sufficient high explosive to blow Big Ben and this Clock Tower into a million fragments—and partially to destroy the Houses of Parliament themselves. A modern Gunpowder Plot, eh? It will take fifteen minutes for the second weight to meet the one on which you are perched. When they come opposite to one another, the fuse of the explosive will be automatically ignited."

"You—you demon!" panted the Home Secretary.

"Either you agree to sign that paper, or you die—

and hundreds of innocent people die with you," gloated Dr. Krane Zitlov. "Should you change your mind you have but to call out, and the weight will be stopped. Swinging above you is Mr. Falcon Swift. Rather a nice touch that, eh? The world's greatest detective—watching, helpless."

The Clockwork Torture.

TICK-TOCK! Tick-tock! The great clock ticked solemnly and slowly; and Falcon Swift, at the end of the pendulum, swung monotonously to and fro.

Hopeless as the Monocled Manhunter's position seemed, he had wracked his brains for some means of getting free. And he had made a startling discovery. Owing to the bulk of his body, attached to the pendulum, his back when he exerted himself, scraped against the steel cables of the weights. Ordinarily, there was ample clearance—but Falcon Swift's bulk made all the difference.

Just at this point there was a frayed part of the steel cable, jagged and treacherous. Every time as the detective swung to and fro he could feel the tug and tear of the jagged section. Careless of any possible hurt to himself, he forced his bound arms backwards to their furthest extent.

To and fro—to and fro! The pendulum swung relentlessly—and every time it carried the Sporting Sleuth past the cable his bonds were weakened more and more. Already the great detective's wrists were lacerated and bleeding. But he set his teeth and he persisted. At last, exerting all his tremendous strength, he made a great effort. With a soft snap the ropes broke.

Down slithered Falcon Swift. At last his feet rested upon the weight itself, and near him, in the darkness, he could hear heavy breathing.

"What—what is happening?" came a hoarse whisper.

"Keep your voice low, Sir Alfred!" muttered Falcon Swift. "It is I."

"Good Heavens!"

"The weights are very close together—and the enemy will be asking for your final answer at any second," continued Falcon Swift. "Now is the moment for action."

He had been deprived of his torch, but he produced an automatic cigarette lighter and flicked the wheel. A tiny flame leapt into life. Falcon Swift saw that he was standing, not upon the weight itself, but upon the great infernal machine which had been attached to the weight. A big metal strip projected outwards—and this, the detective knew, was so designed that it would foul the other weight at the crucial moment.

It was only the work of a moment for the Monocled Manhunter to bend down and to detach the fateful device.

He leaned across, grasped the other cable, and lowered himself. With deft fingers he unfastened the Home Secretary's bonds.

"Thank Heaven!" panted Sir Alfred. "Mr. Swift, you are truly wonderful! But what next? What can we do—?"

He broke off, for at that moment a light gleamed down from above. A trap-door was being opened. Without a word, Falcon Swift dropped.

Thud! The detective was familiar with the shaft of Big Ben, and he knew that a number of great wool cushions lay at the base of the shaft. He struck them softly, and, like a rabbit going to earth, he dived far beneath the cushions, so that he was completely concealed.

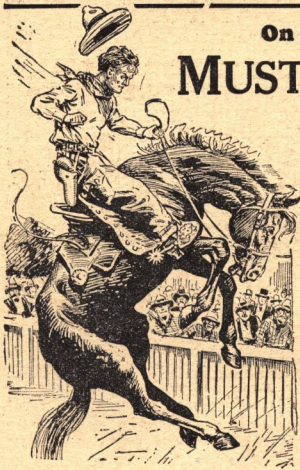
"Ten thousand curses!" said a voice from above. "Swift has gone! Quick, men! Lights—lights!"

It was Dr. Zitlov, and he was mad with rage.

(Continued on page 12.)

YOUR EDITOR'S GOOD THINGS FOR NEXT WEEK!

On Saturday You'll Meet
MUSTANG MORGAN!



This Great Bronco Buster appears for the first time. And there is Falcon Swift; The Boys of St. Giddy's; Hundred per Cent. Percy; The Miracle Boys; The Master of Masks and a Free Gift of **THREE MORE 'ZAT CARDS.**

and I'll exchange your small cards for a Set of 44 Super-sepia Enlarged Test Portrait Cards with which you can play the *Mag.*'s exciting new game 'ZAT.

Special Note.—Don't forget to enclose your full name and address with your Miniature 'ZAT Teams. One or two readers have omitted to do so. Will they send them in right away and I'll forward their 'ZAT Games?

Another Three 'ZAT Card Portraits will be inserted in every copy of next week's number. And they're backed up with a dandy story programme. I've already told you about Mustang Morgan.

Another star attraction is the next exploit of The Iron Spider. This strange and fascinating contrivance was introduced to you this week with Square Crook Connelly. Well, next week the *Mag.*'s famous detective, Falcon Swift, takes a hand in

The Quest of the Iron Spider.

You'll enjoy this high-powered sleuth and crook tale, hingeing, as it does, on that weird invention, the Iron Spider.

Boys who like school yarns will welcome the Boys of St. Giddy's again next week. Their latest amusing exploits are chronicled under the title

'Scuse Our Sculls!

Yes, it's a tale of the sunlit river, of picnics, tuck raids and rivals of the rowlocks. Saturday week is Boat Race day, and the Joyous Juniors decide to get right ahead practising for their own boat race with Tommy Rhodes & Co. of Earlswood, and the Champions of the Rudd—Asheton.

You'll meet also Admiral Thresher—a bluff, hearty old seadog who is on secret work for the Admiralty. International crooks want the admiral's secret, however, and when the boat race mad Removites get mixed up in the trouble there's excitement in plenty. Catchpole and his crazy inventions are also well to the fore in this.

Football is still well represented in the *B.M.* by the Football Family and their Crater of Spectres.

The Football Raiders

are Zorro's latest terrible allies in his efforts to destroy Lord Welham and his Miracle Boys. Nothing less than huge crustaceans, who are set to bore through on to the pitch from the underworld below. But the Scientist Peer outwits the plotter once more, thanks to Ajax and the rest.

For laughs galore you must not miss the doings of Hundred Per Cent Percy who made his bow some time ago. Next week the latest Big Business stunt of J. Bertillon Bogg, Percy's boss, sends the stuttering salesman to U.S.A. A few adventures he has *en passant* make this one of the funniest tales we have had in *Boys' Magazine.*

See you next week, when I hope to have more news for you.

MY DEAR CHUMS,

Hoss sense! That's what Mustang Morgan's got; nothing else but— Excuse me for relapsing into the Wild West vernacular, chaps, but I have just been re-reading next week's great, new, long complete yarn, featuring

Mustang Morgan!

Thrills—you'll find them packed tight in this rip-scorching epic of the open spaces— Fine literature, too, in the description of Taos, the flaming frontier-town of Kit Carson's days—now the resort of wealth and sport. The biggest kick of all you'll get out of meeting Mustang Morgan himself. No milk-and-water hero this—he's as wild as ten tigers, for he rides a killer trail to avenge his dead father. But you'll like him with his uncanny control over horses. Then there's Satan, King of the Wild West horse band, and Comanche Kate and Caesar. Caesar is a two-year-old colt—just a lightning flick quicker than the wild-swift Satan. A winner of races—and an avenger of men! Lastly, there's Quinton Lusk, crime boss, and Mustang Morgan's sworn enemy. The clash of personalities between these two will keep you tense and thrilled all through this grand yarn of the Rio Grande.

Those 'ZAT Games!

'ZAT teams are simply pouring in to be exchanged for 'ZAT games. Regular readers know all about the scheme; but for the benefit of new readers, I'll repeat it. All you have to do is to collect eleven different 'ZAT cards depicting English Test Players—three of which are given each week inside every copy of the *Mag.* To get rid of duplicates you just swap them with your chums. Then send your 'ZAT team to 'ZAT Department, 196, Gray's Inn Road, London.

THE BANDITS OF BIG BEN

(Continued from page 10.)

Lights flashed down into the shaft, and then it was seen that the fuse of the explosive had been rendered useless.

"This is Swift's doing!" gritted Zitlov savagely. "But he has not escaped from me yet. Have you forgotten the wool cushions at the bottom of the shaft? Swift thinks to trick me by concealing himself—but the fool has rendered himself helpless, for there is no outlet down there, and the sides of the shaft are smooth, and he cannot climb. The weights are far above him. He is trapped."

It seemed only too true. Falcon Swift had averted the great disaster, but the Home Secretary was still in the hands of the Comrades of Crime. For the crooks, swarming down the other cable, easily secured him. A rope was passed round his shoulder, and he was hauled up into the Clock Room.

Zitlov was beside himself with baffled fury.

"Swift is helpless—I will deal with him after I have dealt with you, Sir Alfred!" he grated. "Bind him to these cogs, men!"

Sir Alfred recoiled in horror. "You—you don't mean—"

"Ah! You turn pale, yes?" leered the master-crook. "I don't wonder, Sir Alfred! I said that you would have another chance—and I will prove as good as my word!"

But his new plan was that of a fiend incarnate. Under his directions, the Home Secretary was lashed to some of the giant cogs of the great, clockwork machinery. The clock itself was still in operation, ticking slowly, solemnly, the works were moving with their relentless regularity.

"Roughly, you will have five minutes in which to make your decision," said Zitlov. "You are tied to the cogs, Sir Alfred; as the clock ticks, so these cogs move, their teeth engaging. You will be drawn into the machinery, slowly, cruelly. As soon as you consent to grant the pardon of the men who are under sentence, then I will have the clock stopped—and you will be released."

BUT again Falcon Swift proved that he was the cleverer man.

True, there was no way of climbing the shaft; but when Falcon Swift had dropped he had not done so thoughtlessly. For, with him, he took not only the ropes which had bound him to the pendulum, but the ropes which had secured Sir Alfred Mansell.

And there was nobody more expert in the use of the lasso than Falcon Swift! Making his loop with care, he made throw after throw—hurling the rope upwards into the darkness. At last, success rewarded his efforts. The rope coiled round one of the great weights, and took a firm hold. The athletic sleuth swarmed up the rope with the agility of a monkey. Up and up he went—until, at last, he felt the weight itself beneath his hands.

Then he swarmed up the steel cable. Higher and higher he went, and when he reached the top he was able to grasp at the inner part of the trap-door which he had previously seen. Inch by inch he forced it open. . . .

"One minute more, Sir Alfred," came Zitlov's voice. "What is your answer?"

"Do your worst!" came Sir Alfred's forced, but contemptuous tones.

Falcon Swift, realising, with horror, the Home Secretary's position, was filled with admiration at the great man's courage. With a sudden spring the detective was through the trap-door. Before Zitlov could turn, Falcon Swift was at his back.

"Hands up!" rapped out the Monocled Manhunter.

Something hard and round was rammed into Zitlov's back. The master crook gulped, his hands shot upwards.

"You were ill advised, Dr. Zitlov, in leaving me until later," said Falcon Swift mockingly. "Unless your men obey my orders, I will fire—I will drop you as you stand! Tell them to free Sir Alfred."

"Release him—release him!" shrieked Zitlov. "This mad fool will kill me! Release him, I say!"

Now that the tables were turned, Zitlov revealed himself as the blustering coward he was. With his own life in peril, he had no courage left. His men sprang to obey his commands, and Sir Alfred Mansell was quickly freed, and only in the nick of time. For within another few seconds he would have been drawn inexorably into the cruel works of the great clock.

"Sir Alfred, you must help me!" said Falcon Swift, calmly. "Get the guns belonging to these men. Collect them all."

Gun after gun was handed over. Sir Alfred, flushed with excitement, acted with wonderful presence of mind.

With a swift movement, the Monocled Manhunter stood aside, and just as quickly he took one of the guns from Sir Alfred.

"Now, Dr. Zitlov," said Falcon Swift coolly. "I can tell you quite candidly—now—that when I was behind you I was unarmed."

"What!" gasped Zitlov.

"What you thought to be a pistol was nothing more harmful than the end of my fountain pen," continued Falcon Swift urbanely. "But this weapon in my hand is not a fountain pen. Stand just where you are, my friend! If there is any gumplay now you and your men will come off badly."

At that moment a door crashed open, and police and Flying Squad men came pouring in. The game was up.

AS it turned out afterwards, there had been a grim battle in the lower chambers of the Clock Tower. The crooks had been discovered, and although they put up a desperate fight, the officers of the law won.

It was a big triumph for Falcon Swift, for the grim criminal confederation was smashed up for all time—and Dr. Krane Zitlov went to the gallows with many of his underlings.

Look out next week for Mustang Morgan, a great new "Boys' Mag" thrill-maker. He's the slickest Broncho buster of the West, and with his devil-horse Caesar he makes the sparks fly.

THE BOGUS ADMIRAL

(Continued from page 36.)

The sky was now brightening. Carefully, Bob Rostern brought the big Hondurian submarine to rest close alongside the injured *Cleopatra*. "And now we'll get the guns in working order and proceed to give an account of ourselves," Duncan declared, grimly.

"No need for that, I think," Bob said, pointing shoreward. "There's a white flag on its way already."

"Bring the Admiral on deck then and we'll discuss our terms," Duncan said, grimly. "Full repairs to *Cleopatra*. Renewal of stores and cargo. Immunity from arrest or interference in Hondurian waters. Immediate return of Bob's amphibian!"

Admiral Vertigo's face was green, but he recognised the inevitable. Twice he swallowed before he spoke. "Señor, it shall be done as you say: all of it," he gasped at length.

There's still plenty of time to collect a team of 'ZAT' cards, chaps. Send them in to the Editor at once and win the great game of 'ZAT'.

THE BOY MILLIONAIRE
BIG-FIGHT PROMOTER!

The Funniest Boxing Tale Ever—featuring Hoppy
Travers and Battling Bullson.



THE
HAUNTED
PUGILIST!

Battling Bullson
and Hoppy Leapt Out
of their Chairs at Sight
of that Unearthly Face.

The Hefty Ref.

"HECTOR," said Hoppy Travers, pausing with his spoon poised over the morning egg, "do you know anything about starting a fight?"

"Starting a fight, sir?" The queer question seemed to occasion the invaluable valet no surprise. "Why, sir, I should imagine that a fight could be started in quite a number of ways. I, myself, once started quite a pretty battle by inadvertently eating a navy's bread and cheese. Fortunately, he imagined his friend to be the culprit, and—"

"Don't tell me a bedtime story," begged Hoppy. "What I meant was—do you know anything about starting a boxing match?"

"Promoting a prizefight, sir?"

"Have it that way if you like," said Hoppy impatiently. "The thing is, I've discovered a new heavyweight—an absolute world-beater, Hector—and I want to put him up against Mike Mahaffey."

Such extraordinary notions were not uncommon with Hoppy Travers, the boy millionaire, and on this occasion, at least, his notion was not nearly so freakish as it seemed.

The day before, when motoring through the little Sumpshire village of Todin-le-hole, he had seen what he had at first taken to be an exceptionally savage Rugby game in progress. On closer inspection, it had turned out to be a visiting football team, having a hot argument with a local referee.

The ref. had won that argument with ease. Single-handed, he had licked all eleven of those beefy ball-booters, while Hoppy looked on and applauded in amazed admiration.

Mike Mahaffey, the world-champion, was at that time touring England, and it had maddened Hoppy

to see the way the Irish-American was knocking the bottom out of British boxing. Here at last, he had realised with a thrill, was a Briton who could knock spots off Mike Mahaffey.

On making inquiries, he discovered that the hefty ref. was a pigkeeper by profession and was known as Bill Bullson. Hoppy had had a long talk with the pugacious pigkeeper, who had agreed to be trained, at the boy millionaire's expense, for a meeting with Mahaffey.

"I greatly doubt, sir," said Hector Soames, when he heard all this, "whether you will be able to persuade the champion to meet a newcomer."

"Oh, yes, I will," Hoppy retorted, confidently. "I'll offer him a million dollar purse. That'll fetch him—and he won't win it, anyway."

During the next two days Hoppy, by his customary high-speed methods, had a Surrey cottage fixed up as training quarters, and he and Soames were examining the fixings of the improvised gymnasium when "Battling" Bullson, as Hoppy had decided to call him, arrived.

He was a large man, six feet high and about three feet wide. He had hands like hams and a face like a slab of rock, and he was not much good at talking. Proudly, Hoppy introduced him to Soames.

"Happy to meet you," beamed the valet.

"Oy!" said Bullson.

"Splendid weather we're having," said Soames.

"Oy!" said Bullson.

"I trust you had a pleasant journey," said Soames.

"Oy!" said Bullson.

Then, seeming to feel that he had done enough talking for one day, he stripped off his jacket, crossed to the punch-ball and gave it what looked like a playful pat.

Bonk! The ball left its moorings and shot across the gym. with the speed of a bullet. It struck Hector forcibly on the nose, and the valet turned a complete somersault before he landed on terra firma again.

"Ha, ha, ha—yup!" said Hoppy, as the ball rebounded and hit him in the ear.

"He's got a punch, Hector," he murmured, when his head had stopped singing.

"He, cerdaddy does bossess a bunch, sir," agreed Hector, massaging his nose tenderly.

"And he can take 'em, too," Hoppy added. "Got a jaw like a rock, Hector. You watch me hit him."

He stood on a box to get at smiting level with the stolid Bullson's jaw, and swung a mighty punch at it.

Now, Bill Bullson was quite willing to let anybody punch his jaw in a friendly spirit. He wouldn't have moved an inch if a sudden desire to sneeze hadn't swung his head back. As it was, Hoppy's fist missed by the merest fraction, and, under the impetus of his mighty swing, Hoppy flew off the box like a bird. He landed in a corner, on his left ear.

"You idiot!" he howled, when he could speak. "You should stand still when you see me do that sort of thing!"

"Oy!" said Bullson.

With an impatient snort, Hoppy ordered Hector to put on the gloves. He wanted to see how Bullson shaped with them.

"Who—be, sir?" The valet looked as if he were going to have some kind of fit. "Doe, sir! I'b sorry, sir, but I couldn't dreach ob it!"

"Oh, all right," snapped Hoppy, crossly. "I'll have to wait till the sparring partners turn up. In the meantime, I'll give him a turn with the medicine ball." And he flipped the sphere at Bullson.

It was a silly thing to do. Battling Bullson might have been a little slow in the brain, but he was greased lightning in the arm. The ball came back with the force of a thunderbolt, and it took Hoppy in the wind.

He said "Oof!"—and then he didn't take any further interest in his surroundings for quite a long time.

The Man-Killer.

WITH a first-rate trainer and a bunch of the toughest ex-pugs in England, the training of Bill the Battler was soon in full swing.

Hoppy was able to fix up the match with Mahaffey with ridiculous ease, for the champion hadn't had a million dollar purse for a long, long time. And he had no fear whatever of losing his title to this country bumpkin, who had never yet fought in a ring. It was not until after the agreement had been signed—Hoppy signing for Bullson, who couldn't write—that Mike and his manager began to have doubts.

For now Hoppy invited prominent sportsmen and sporting writers to see the Battler at work, and the public began to hear wonderful things about Bullson. The writers went into hysterics about his trip-hammer punch, his lightning speed, and his cast-iron jaw.

"Splendid!" chortled Hoppy, surrounded by newspapers and devouring them eagerly. "This is getting the public interested. We'll have to hire the biggest hall in London, Bullson."

"Oy!" said Bullson, and having finished work, he put on his hat and went out for one of the quiet strolls which were his daily habit.

He chose, as usual, an unfrequented lane, and he had not gone far when a tough-looking individual stepped out of the hedge and stood in his path.

"Arf a mo," said this gent, in a voice as nasty as his looks. "You got any money, matey? 'Cause if so—and it over. An' if you makes any fuss, you gets a sock on the jaw, see?"

Bullson didn't even trouble to say "oy." He simply handed the tough-looking person what looked like a slight shove in the chest, and that worthy flew backwards in a beautiful arc. He crashed to the ground and lay very still. At that moment a car, which had come unnoticed from round a bend just ahead, drew up beside him.

"What's this? What have you done to this man?" exclaimed the stout man who climbed out of the vehicle. He glared at Bullson accusingly, as did the huge, dark fellow who remained behind the wheel. Then he bent to the fallen, motionless figure, his hand feeling at the heart.

"This is a matter for the police," he said grimly. "The man's dead!"

For once in his life Battling Bullson's brain worked swiftly. Dead—and he had no witnesses to prove that the man had threatened him. Bullson saw himself facing a stern judge; saw himself being led to a scaffold.

"Goo!" exclaimed the ex-pigkeeper, and in one wonderful leap he was over the hedge and streaking like a greyhound for home.

The Fearful Face.

WHAT'S the trouble, Battler? Hoppy asked that evening, as they sat listening to the wireless. He had noticed the queer, seared look on the big fellow's face, and the way he started at every sound.

As a matter of fact the Battler was expecting every moment that tall figures in blue would appear in the doorway, armed with a warrant for his arrest, but he did not tell Hoppy his troubles.

It was a minute later that a wild shriek, almost in his ear, made Hoppy leap from his chair. It had come from Bullson, who was pointing to the uncurtained window with a look of ghastly fear upon his face.

There, pressed against the glass, and glowing with an unearthly, greenish radiance, was a face. There was no neck nor body; just that dreadful, glowing face. Even as Hoppy looked, it disappeared, and Bullson became a quivering, terrified heap of humanity in the chair.

"E've coom back!" he was muttering hoarsely. "E've coom back to haunt Oi!"

Then Hoppy was through the door, flashing a torch in the darkness. He saw nobody. And what was more, in the flower bed, where anyone looking in at the window must have stood, there was not a single footprint!

"Wuh-what's it mean?" muttered Hoppy, as he came indoors. But Bullson refused to say a word.

During the ensuing week Bullson saw that ghastly face, the face of the man he had knocked down, four times, and it had a devastating effect on his nerve. He could neither eat nor sleep, nor would he tell his secret.

"This is awful," groaned Hoppy. "Only three days to the fight, and he looks a wreck. We're lied!"

Hector Soames could only nod gloomily, and wish that he hadn't backed the Battler for a fiver.

THE Central Stadium was crowded on the big night, but Hoppy knew that the receipts wouldn't pay a tenth part of the huge purse Mahaffey was to get if he won. And Hoppy was very much afraid that he would win, for though the Battler, having seen no more faces in the last three days, had recaptured a little of his nerve, he was still not the Battler of old.

From his ringside seat Hoppy heard the referee introduce the two men. It did not strike him that

somehow Mahaffey managed to keep his face away from the Battler until the ref. had stepped back.

Then the two big fellows came face to face—and Battling Bullson nearly fell down. His eyes popped and his guard dropped. For Mahaffey was the man who had been at the wheel of the car—one of the men who could give him away to the police.

Bullson gave one gasp, and then there came a terrific crack as Mahaffey's left, swung with all the skill and strength at his command, connected with the Battler's unguarded jaw. With a crash that shook the building, about two hundredweight of pig-keeper hit the floor, and from the crowd rose a great gasp of dismay.

The Professional Spook.

HOPPY shut his eyes as the ref. stood over the prone body of Bullson, but he opened them again when he heard his voice break off at "three."

Battling Bullson of the cast-iron jaw, was not knocked out. But he wished, as he came to his feet,

In the third round the crowd began to mutter, in the fourth it started to hiss and boo; but still the farce went on, with Mahaffey piling up the points and Bullson miserably pulling his punches.

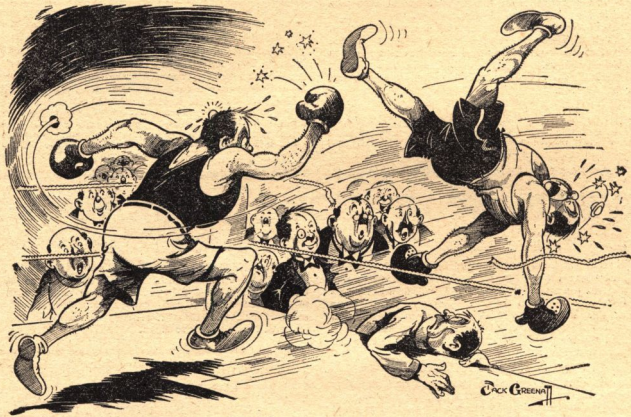
As the ninth round—the last but one—commenced, Hoppy, who saw his million dollars as good as thrown away, could stand it no longer. With a heart too full for words he got up and went to Bullson's dressing-room. At any rate, he promised himself, he would have something to say to the Battler after the fight.

But Hoppy forgot all that as the sound of a voice raised in anger came from Mahaffey's dressing-room, next door.

"I tell you I wants another hundred quid... now! Otherwise, I goes straight out an' shows meself to Battling Bullson. An' as soon as he knows that I ain't dead—he'll knock Mike into the middle of next Wednesday!"

"You wouldn't do that, Steve?" came another voice, pleadingly.

With twitching ears Hoppy listened, and he heard



CHIN-CHIN TO THE CHAMP.—Bullson seemed to flicker, and his fist connected with the champion's jaw. Mahaffey burst through the ropes as though he had been shot from a gun.

that he had been. For he knew that his only hope of keeping his dreadful secret was to buy Mahaffey's silence by letting him win.

Hoppy Travers watched in disgusted amazement as that first round continued. He saw Mahaffey rush in again and again, flinging a fusillade of blows; and though it was like hitting a brick wall, it was scoring points all the time. And Bullson, instead of getting his own mighty punch into action, just flipped and flapped and dabbed.

"What's up with you?" yelled Hoppy, at the end of the round. "Why don't you hit him?"

Poor Bullson answered not a word, as he slowly rose, at the sound of the gong, to do the same thing all over again.

enough, in the next two minutes, to give him the outline of the cunning scheme by which he was even now being swindled out of a million dollars.

It was Mahaffey's manager, in the next room, who had engineered the whole thing; who had paid Steve to threaten Bullson, take a punch, and sham dead as the waiting car came up. It was he who had lowered Steve, with his face smeared with phosphorus, from the roof, in order that the "ghost" at the window should leave no footprints.

He had broken the Battler's nerve and forced him to sell the fight—and now he was being blackmailed by his own confederate.

With a yell of rage Hoppy rushed into the room upon the two startled men. Hoppy wasn't very big,

but in that moment he had the strength of fury, and when he seized the tough-looking Steve's ear in a vice-like grip, Steve didn't stop to argue.

Hoppy dragged him, howling, into the hall. Amid exclamations of surprise from all sides he hugged him to the ringside, just before the gong went for the last round.

Battling Bullson gave one look—and one awful, long-drawn howl. Had Hoppy not clutched his ankle and hung on like grim death, he would have been over the ropes and flying out of the building.

"He's not a ghost!" Hoppy yelled frantically. "You didn't kill him, Battler! It was a fake!"

Somehow Bullson managed to understand, and to pull himself together as the gong sounded.

He stood very still as Mike Mahaffey, looking somewhat scared, circled cautiously. Then suddenly he seemed to flicker, and something connected with Mahaffey's jaw.

It was Bullson's first punch—and his last. Mike Mahaffey went through the ropes as though he had been shot from a gun, and ten seconds later, amid thunderous roars from the crowd, the referee was holding Battling Bullson's hand aloft.

But in the morning came sensation number two. For Bill Bullson, despite Hoppy's almost tearful entreaties, packed his bag and went back to his pigs at Todin-le-hole. Boxing, he said, in the longest speech he had ever been known to make, was too much for his nerves.

Hundred Per Cent Percy, the smartest, go-getting he-salesman fun-maker ever, in an uproarious humorous yarn next week. Look for the title, "The Rash Cash Dash."

THE IRON SPIDER (Continued from page 20.) Connolley trembled with agitation as he read the astounding story of the Hatton Garden robbery.

How he had been tricked! What an innocent dupe! And now he had to bear the consequences of the crook's crime.

Ralph Connolley groaned, his brain swimming with helpless terror.

Then as he gradually became calmer and took stock of his position, his face grew hard. He stood up with clenched fists.

"Prince of crooks!" he muttered low. "Right; I'll get you, even if I have to turn crook myself. Your path has not been straight, not straight enough to turn in. You're bound to come back to the Underworld, to the world of crime. There I'll find you. You've made me a crook, but I shall be known as a square crook."

And in the days to come it so proved to be. A new, strange, mysterious crook came to the Underworld. Frightening was the Iron Spider, until men came to know him. But curiously, the stories that went round with bated breath about the Iron Spider were not stories such as to make men shudder.

So the legend grew in the Underworld. Men went in fear of the Iron Spider, but not of the man within. Another nickname for the personality within the Iron Spider came into being, and it stuck. They called him "Square Crook Connolley."

Don't miss next week's startling yarn of the Iron Spider, chaps. It's the greatest 'tec yarn ever, in which Falcon Swift gets on the trail of the Square Crook.

WHEN WAS YOUR BIRTHDAY?

Were You Fifteen on May 30th Last?

EVERY reader whose age last birthday appears on this page, together with the correct date, can claim a wonderful Birthday Gift. Lists of dates and ages are given below. Look out for your birthday. If you cannot claim a present to-day, you may be able to do so next week.

This week's special presents will be sent to all readers who claim that they were

15 years old on MAY 30th last.

In addition, every reader whose age last birthday appears in the list given below, under the correct birthday date, will qualify for a delightful present from a splendid range of birthday gifts.

Birthday	Jan.	Mar.	May	June	Aug.	Oct.	Nov.
Dates	1 .. 18 .. 30 .. 11 .. 24 .. 6 .. 9						
Years	8 .. 9 .. 10 .. 12 .. 8 .. 9 .. 10						
of age	12 .. 13 .. 14 .. 15 .. 14 .. 13 .. 15						
Last Birthday	18 .. 17 .. 16 .. 18 .. 18 .. 16 .. 17						

HOW TO CLAIM A GIFT.

If your age last birthday appears on this page in connection with the date of your birthday, sign the coupon and get a friend to vouch for the accuracy of your claim, which will be checked. Then post the Claim Coupon to:

Birthday Gifts No. 14,
Boys' Magazine,
Pump Yard, Manchester 4 (Comp.),

to arrive not later than first post on Thursday, March 9th.

Lists of Birthday Gifts will also be found in BETTY'S PAPER and WEEK END NOVELS this week. Tell all your family about these wonderful offers, and, above all, don't fail to look for your own birthday in each of these splendid gift scheme lists.

CLAIM COUPON

BIRTHDAY GIFTS No. 14.

CLOSING DATE FOR CLAIMS,
THURSDAY, MARCH 9 (first post).

I hereby claim a Birthday Gift, in view of the fact that I was (age) _____ years of age on (date) _____ last

NAME

ADDRESS

.....

(This portion must be signed and filled in by a friend to whom you have given proof of the correctness of your claim.)

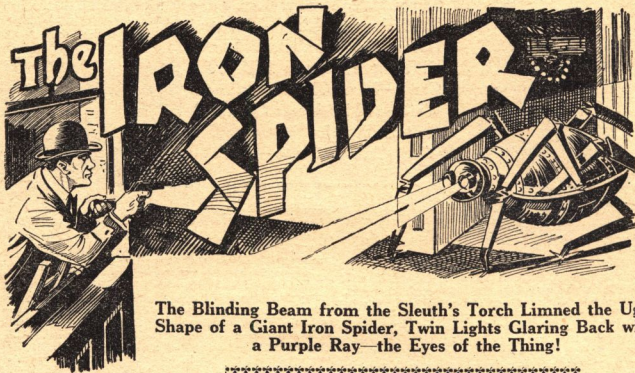
I have verified the above details, and am prepared to vouch for the accuracy of the claim.

SIGNED

ADDRESS

B.M. 11/3/33

THE CROOK WITH SIX LEGS! That's the Iron Spider—the Most Amazing Mechanical 'Tec Trickster of Modern Times.



The Blinding Beam from the Sleuth's Torch Limned the Ugly Shape of a Giant Iron Spider, Twin Lights Glaring Back with a Purple Ray—the Eyes of the Thing!

The Crib Cracker.

THEY say advertisement is good for trade. But Flash Harry didn't need publicity in his business. He was an expert safe cracker. He dressed in evening clothes at night, even when he was on a job, and they fitted his lithe, tigerish figure well.

To-night he was on the biggest job he had ever pulled. He had prepared for it for months, and he hoped to retire after this.

It was a Hatton Garden job. In Hatton Gardens, just off Holborn, are the offices of some of the biggest diamond merchants in the world. Cracksmen, as a rule, leave them severely alone. There are traps there for the unwary.

Flash Harry knew all about that. He had broken into the topmost storey of Seligjohn's, the diamond merchants, and was at present busy cracking the safe. How he had broken into that high office was a wonder. He proposed to make his getaway in exactly the same fashion. But it was going to be his last job.

The massive safe presented few difficulties to Flash Harry. He worked with "soup"—that is nitroglycerine, a high-powered explosive—and piled blankets against the safe to deaden the sound.

Soon it came, a dull, muffled explosion, and the heavy door of the safe sagged open as he removed the blankets.

Flash Harry was under no illusions, however. He knew that there were concealed burglar alarms in the diamond merchant's upper room, and that he had probably set one or more of them off.

In this he was quite right. Under the carpet was set an ingenious, electrical device, and by stepping on it inadvertently, he had set an alarm buzzing in the office of a night-watchman down below. The watchman, roused from sleep, had already 'phoned up the police, and Flying Squad cars from Scotland Yard were quickly converging on the scene. In this way, and others, London is guarded by night.

Flash Harry had yet to make his getaway. Only

too well did he know it. Strain showed in his face now under the black domino mask he wore; his jaw muscles were twitching as he reached a hand into the safe. Yet he remained cool and worked methodically. For it was Flash Harry's boast that he had never been put out of his stride by the threat of danger.

His teeth showed in a white line under his trim moustache as he drew a chamois leather bag from the safe, and with slender, white fingers opened it.

Glinting eyes through the mask slits stared at a number of stones, steel-blue in colour, heavy diamonds, rich, glinting.

"Worth a quarter of a million if a penny," he breathed.

Then suddenly he froze. His sixth sense told him the window was being opened stealthily. Scotland Yard had caught him, red-handed.

Flash Harry moved. In a split second the chamois leather bag with its quarter of a million pounds of jewels was gone, and from his hip, like a dully glinting snake, a revolver jumped up to his hand. He whirled round, firing; his swiftness was lightning-like.

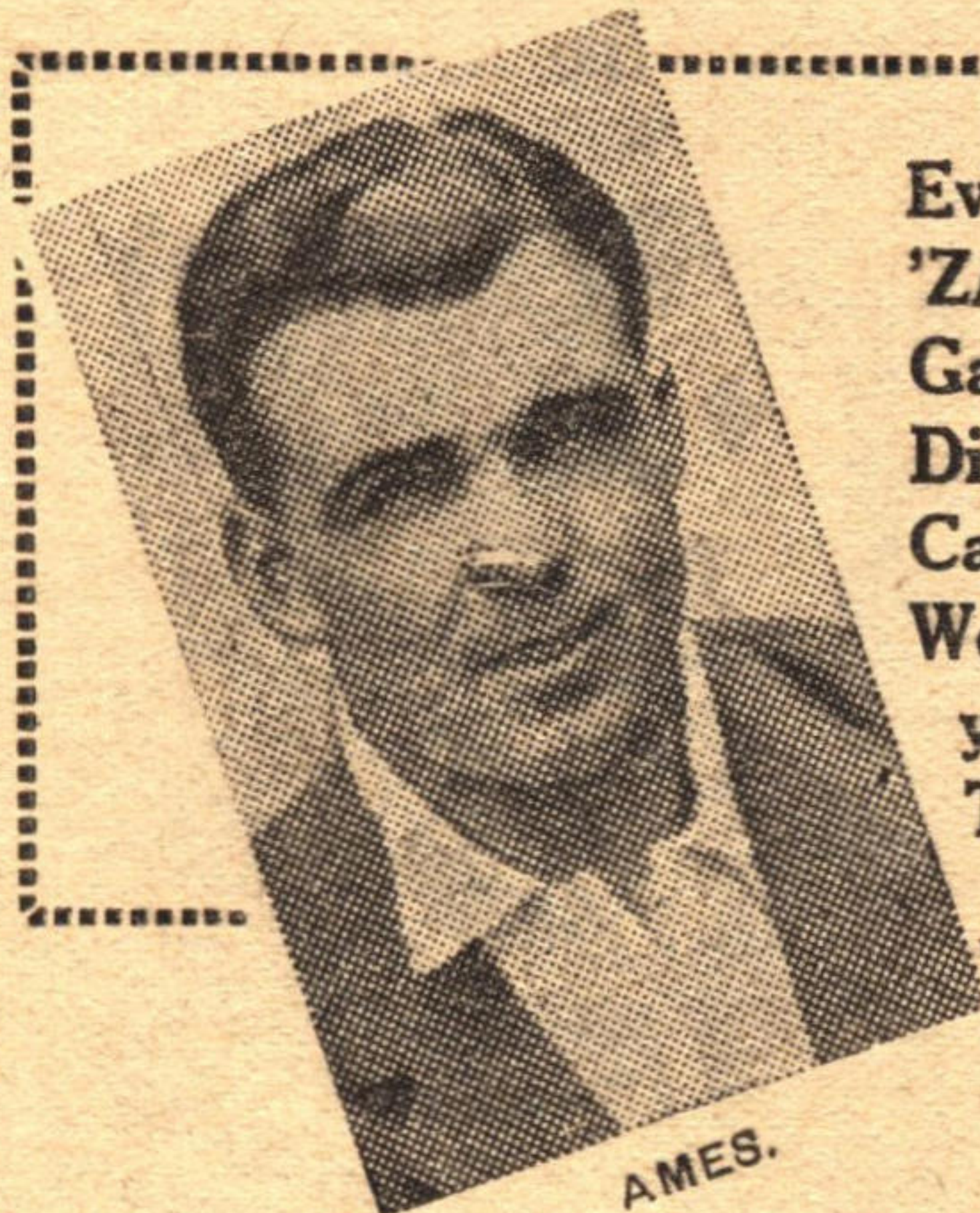
The three Scotland Yard detectives at the half-raised window were fairly taken by surprise. The detective in charge switched on the blinding light of his flashlight, hoping to dazzle and confuse the quarry while they got in the room and rushed him.

Flash Harry let them have four fast ones all around the flashlight. Then, concentrating on the dazzling light, he put it out with a crashing bullet.

"Confound him, he's slick! Get him!" shouted the detective as they scrambled in the room.

Police surrounded the building, and they reckoned they were sure of their quarry. But there was some confusion in the dark while the Scotland Yard men found cover behind the furniture. Precious seconds were wasted.

At last another officer's blinding torch flashed on. It lit the Iron Spider. A sight so fearsome that for



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went over on the heavy cables and telegraph lines, with the baffled police watching below. He was kept in sight over the roofs of Shoe Lane, but he dropped down into one of the many back alleys, and disappeared.

The police were forced to wait until morning before they could follow up the track. Then they found that the Iron Spider had descended through a manhole into one of the old passages of the Fleet. The tunnel led down to the Thames river; therefore the police consoled themselves that they had a definite clue and were well on the track.

The Square Crook.

BIG BEN was chiming out the hour of three o'clock in the morning over darkened London. The hour when human energies seem at their weakest, and Life is at its ebb.

Ralph Connolly sighed as he leant over the Embankment staring at some coloured sky-signs still winking and spinning, and the dark waters of the Thames in which they were reflected.

"I reckon the world owes me a living," he muttered grimly.

There were taut lines about his young jaw. Lips, nostrils, brown eyes and high brow were all cast in the mould of a dreamer. Wavy chestnut hair and a slim, athletic body completed the picture of this sensitive youth.

He had chosen in life the profession of inventor, and somehow he had failed. Many clever devices had come from his fertile brain, but he had always been robbed of the fruits of his toil. Unscrupulous people had tricked him and stolen his ideas. He was not worldly or shrewd enough to look after his business interests.

Now as a young man he felt himself at the end of his tether. Indeed, he might have been starving, save for his friend, Professor Silver.

The boy's fine eyes softened as he thought how the white-haired Professor had taken him up, had given him food, lodging, materials to keep on with his inventions, and had left him alone with his sole delight, his work.

The young man turned from the Embankment suddenly as he heard the whirr of tired wheels coming up to the kerb, and a voice—the Professor's—calling: "Here, Ralph; come quickly!"

Professor Silver was leaning out from the taxi-cab that had drawn up at the curb. The young inventor crossed over to him eagerly.

"Well, sir, did you give it a trial? What did you think of it?" he asked, his tone tense with anxiety.

Professor Silver allowed his lips to part in a slight, enigmatical smile. He made a striking figure in dress clothes and opera cloak, with his white hair, dark moustache and eyes so strangely in contrast. Eyes that seemed to search uneasily around amidst the dark shadows.

"Get in lad," he said in a low tone, "and I'll tell you about it."

The young inventor clambered into the seat beside the professor, and the taxi-cab drove swiftly away. For a time Professor Silver would say nothing in the darkness of the interior in reply to the boy's eager questions. He kept looking behind through the rear window of the taxi, and in his eyes lurked fear.

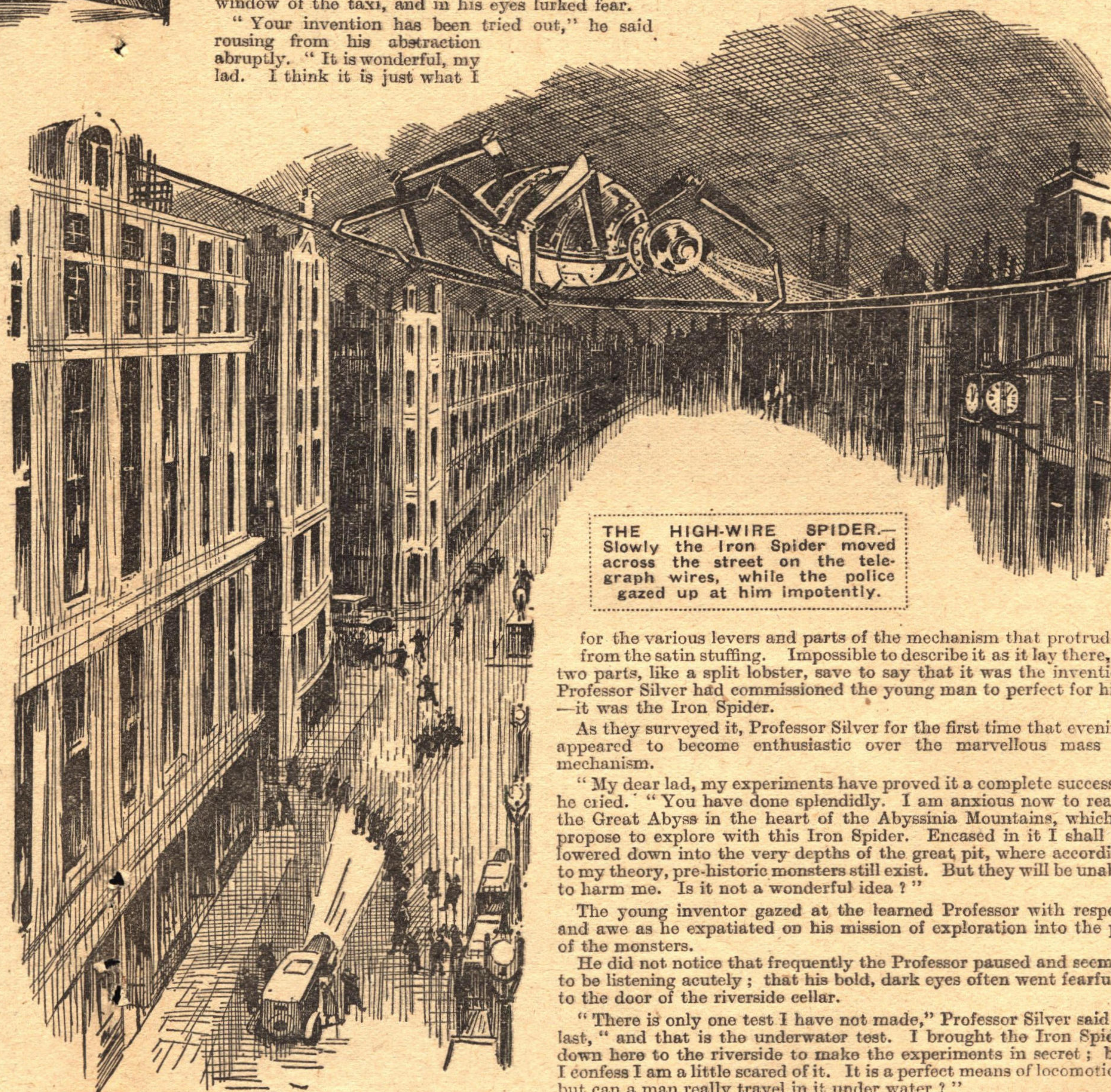
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They alighted from the taxi near the wharves in the East End.

"There are a few more trials and experiments I wish to make," the white-haired Professor said hurriedly as he led the lad through various dark alleyways, and so through a door into a dank, riverside cellar. "I brought your invention here for secrecy."

Ralph Connolly looked around as a gas jet was lit. There was his invention lying on the stone floor of the great, bare cellar. Opened, it looked like nothing so much as a great, padded jewel case, save



THE HIGH-WIRE SPIDER.—Slowly the Iron Spider moved across the street on the telegraph wires, while the police gazed up at him impotently.

a moment the detectives gasped. There it was crouched on the carpet in the middle of the room, limned in the blinding beam of the torch. The ugly shape of the giant spider, with twin lights glaring back with a purple ray that changed to red. The eyes of the thing!

The Scotland Yard men were no fools, but for a moment or two they were taken aback, and an eerie chill crept down their spines.

Too late, they recognised the thing as a monstrous piece of mechanism. The crook was inside. He was operating the machinery. The legs, like great steel springs, stretched out on the carpet, got a grip, and then—

"Look out!" cried one of the 'tecs.

Bullets blazed at it. They took no effect, apparently, but merely flattened out against that protective metal casing. The Scotland Yard man who had cried out threw himself in front of the window as the Iron Spider leapt.

He felt the crushing weight of the metal body against his chest as he was knocked aside. The Spider crouched on the window sill a second or two, a monstrous horrid sight, its steel claws scrunching in the woodwork.

The police below saw it as it commenced to climb sheer up the wall to the roof. They saw it next hanging as if on a strand, and moving steadily up as is the fashion of a spider. Then it was clambering on the roof.

Instantly the police became active. Whistles shrilled and motor-cars dashed out into Holborn. Other detectives of the Flying Squad clambered up the ladder, intent on gaining the roof.

Here was a new form of criminal. But Scotland Yard was not to be deterred. To the police sleuths it was just another man hunt—as yet. And once on the track they were not easily shaken off.

The senior detective in charge was the first to gain the roof. He and others coming behind saw the ungainly, iron spider moving over the sloping roofs of a famous Holborn store, and they flashed down signals to the police to surround the front.

As the Scotland Yard men rushed over the roof after their quarry, the Detective-Inspector in charge bent with a flashlamp.

"He'll not escape. See here, those mechanical claws have left marks in the slates!" he exclaimed to his immediate subordinate. "If we don't get him now, we'll be able to trail him down."

But the Iron Spider escaped across the street. He

for the various levers and parts of the mechanism that protruded from the satin stuffing. Impossible to describe it as it lay there, in two parts, like a split lobster, save to say that it was the invention Professor Silver had commissioned the young man to perfect for him—it was the Iron Spider.

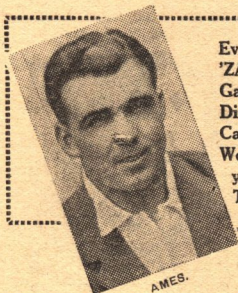
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The young inventor gazed at the learned Professor with respect and awe as he expatiated on his mission of exploration into the pit of the monsters.

He did not notice that frequently the Professor paused and seemed to be listening acutely; that his bold, dark eyes often went fearfully to the door of the riverside cellar.

"There is only one test I have not made," Professor Silver said at last, "and that is the underwater test. I brought the Iron Spider down here to the riverside to make the experiments in secret; but I confess I am a little scared of it. It is a perfect means of locomotion, but can a man really travel in it under water?"



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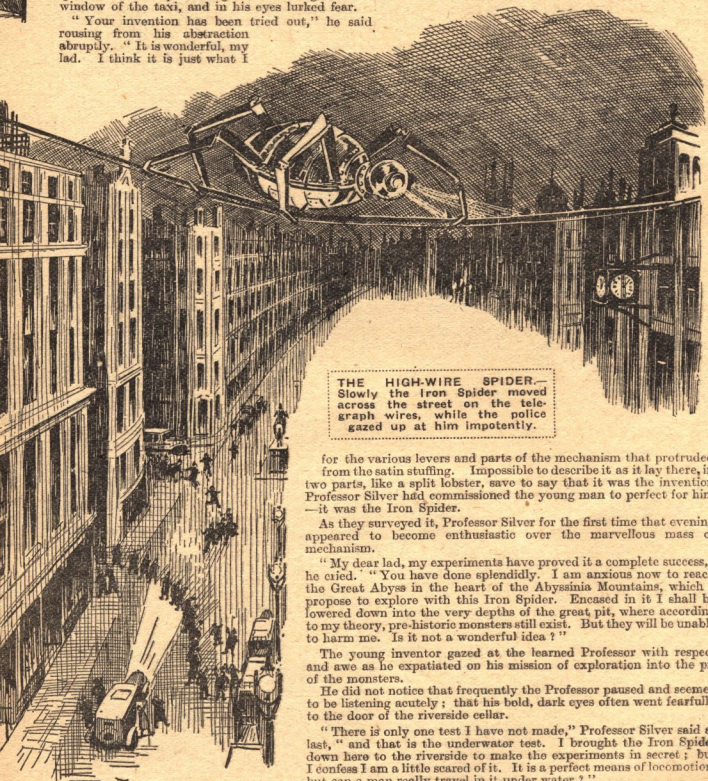
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"There is only one test I have not made," Professor Silver said at last, "and that is the underwater test. I brought the Iron Spider down here to the riverside to make the experiments in secret; but I confess I am a little scared of it. It is a perfect means of locomotion. but can a man really travel in it under water?"

"Yes, indeed," said the young inventor eagerly. "He can travel in perfect safety in twenty feet of water. See, I will demonstrate to you myself, Professor."

And the young inventor proceeded to get into the padded metal case which, when closed up, resembled nothing so much as a monstrous iron spider.

He laid down in the right hand part, the pneumatic cushions of which were moulded to a man's figure. To his hands were the controls which operated the iron spider's steel spring legs, and at his mouth was a tube arrangement, which could be fitted over his head, and through which oxygen could be supplied from a container, while the Iron Spider was under water.

"Let me help you, my dear boy!"

For the first time a gleam of positive cunning leapt into the dark, reckless eyes of Professor Silver as he stepped forward. Base emotions—fear, savagery—fled across his face as he looked again towards

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the door of the underground cellar. But the young inventor did not see this startling change in the learned "Professor" Silver.

The man in evening dress bent over the mechanism. It simply folded over on hinges, like a gigantic, metal case. But what Ralph Conolley did not know as he heard the click of its shutting, was that his patron, the so-called Professor, had had fitted to it a new self-locking spring, which would have defied the efforts of the most expert locksmith for hours to break open.

As it clicked shut the young man was a prisoner within his own invention. He could never escape without outside help. The man in evening dress stepped back.

"There you are, my lad," he said in a changed voice, a voice in which a sneer was palpable. "I guess you're all wrapped up, ready for the police."

Within the contrivance Ralph Conolley started. Something warned him, like an electric shock tingling through every nerve in his body.

He got hastily to his feet. "What do you mean?" he demanded sharply, and fear rang in his voice as he pressed the release catch inside the Iron Spider, and found it unresponsive. The metal casing failed to open.

The "Professor" bowed, and looked at his victim, with the imps of wicked torment dancing in his eyes.

Ralph Conolley stood before him like some half-garbed monster for a pantomime or carnival. He stood on his own feet, for the metal casing of the Iron Spider encased him only to his thighs. The lower portion was supplied by a silver shell, which at present stood on the floor of the cellar. It had what is known as an "interrupted" screw thread—that is to say, the thread was cut in three or four places, to fit into the other part of the casing like a plug. A single turn engaged the screw in a second. So that in almost a second the man inside the Iron Spider might have the use of his feet and *vice versa*.

Also there were spring metal trap-holes through which the arms could be thrust. Thus the Iron Spider had the use of legs and arms when he needed them. But in other respects Ralph Conolley was as much a prisoner as if he had been put in a strait jacket.

"What—what d'you mean?" he demanded again with a dread misgiving pumping panic through him.

For reply Professor Silver plucked at his imposing and dignified silver hair, whipped it away, revealing that it was a wig.

With the action he bowed again mockingly and held towards his victim a copy of the early edition of a morning newspaper, still damp from the press.

"That will enlighten you," the man said mockingly. Again his eyes roved restlessly, flickering with fear towards the door of the cellar. "I am afraid I shall not be able to take your invention into the depths of Darkest Africa to investigate the prehistoric monsters of the pit. Nor can I spare the time to explain. The newspaper will tell you all, my young friend."

"Wait!" cried Ralph Conolley hoarsely as the bogus Professor darted towards the door. He interposed his cumbersome body between, with arms stretched through the trap-holes.

"The key," he cried desperately. "Give it me, if you've fitted a new lock."

"Oh, the key," the crook said coolly; "that I'm going to throw into the river. The police will have to force you open if they want you, for the spring lock is well-nigh unbreakable. I should try to elude the police for as long as you can, my young friend. How long depends upon your natural resource and ingenuity."

With dawning horror and understanding, the young inventor in the cumbersome Iron Spider's suit made a desperate spring upon the man who had so vilely betrayed his trust and confidence. But the crook easily eluded him and reached the door of the cellar.

"Wait! Who are you, then?" cried the young man hoarsely.

The "Professor" turned mockingly on the threshold. "I am a prince of crooks, as you'll see if you read that paper," he said suavely. "But, my friend, your invention has one defect. The claws leave a trail as they grip. Consequently the police are on the track of the Iron Spider."

"And they'll get—me?" gasped Ralph Conolley, almost reeling in horror. Then, in a transport of anger, he cried:

"Listen—crook! I swear the police won't take me, but I'll get you as sure as we're standing here. And I warn you—you'll unlock this yourself and set me free. That I swear. If you do away with the key, I'll kill you with my own hands."

Something in his shaking earnestness made the crook change expression.

"If you can escape the police, you're clever," he said quietly. "And I'll watch out for you."

The inventor in the Iron Spider made a sudden rush at him. With a mocking laugh the crook disappeared, slamming the door of the cellar. The eerie echoes in the cellar and the patter of his running footsteps were the only sounds, while the young inventor in his grotesque iron suit stood with clenched hands. The full realisation of his fearful position was beginning to dawn on him.

Some inner voice told him the madness of pursuing. Already he was beginning to realise he was a branded man; in worse case than any ordinary pariah or outcast from society. He was "wanted."

Wanted—for what?

He sat down on an empty cask and opened the newspaper. It was there in big black headlines, the burglarious exploit of the Iron Spider. Young Ralph

(Continued on page 16.)

THE GREATEST YARN OF MYSTERY AND INTRIGUE, OF SPIES,
KINGS AND THE SECRET SERVICE EVER PENNED.

The MASTER of MASKS



Begin this Thriller To-day
Specially Written by
JOHN HUNTER

DARK forces of evil were at work! Crime was let loose! Tragedy! Even death itself seemed to be personified in the strange, intoxicating, sickly sweet scent of the perfumed envelope Billy Trent held in his hand.

Ten minutes the stranger had told him to wait when he gave Billy that letter. Already a stifling foreboding of ill overwhelmed the little page-boy of the Imperial Theatre. And as the stranger had hurried off something had fallen from his pocket. It was the size and shape of a visiting card, but it was made of chromium-plated steel and engraved on it was an arithmetical fraction $\frac{3}{12}$.

Below this was inscribed: *To be found in London on the front of the age, every day, link-ups.*

With a laugh, Billy Trent tried to throw off the fearful presentiment that held him in its grip. At the same time he realised that the ten minutes were up, and having tapped at the door was bidden to enter. He handed the letter to the ambassador, who told him to wait. It was while this happened that the great ape Johann, the star attraction of the performance, began his sensational walk on a tight-rope round the well of the theatre.

It reached the ambassador's box, sniffed loudly, got the scent of the perfumed envelope, and reaching out a terrible, hairy arm, lifted the Ambassador from the box. Next moment Johann had slid to the stage and vanished with his burden.

Instantly there was pandemonium. Billy was taken to the manager's office. He found there a detective, the manager and a lithe, dapper man in the

most exquisitely cut evening dress he had ever seen. He wore a monocle and gaped through this at Billy.

"This is Mr. Brame Sentence," said the manager. "The biggest shareholder in this theatre. Now tell us what happened."

Billy told his story and showed the steel visiting card. He was dismissed and returned home. But he had not been back long when Mr. Sentence called.

"Well, my boy, we are going to have a heart to heart talk."

No longer was it the squeaking, futile voice of the Mr. Sentence of the theatre, but the crisp, decisive accents of a man of action. Once again Billy told his story.

"Now listen, my boy," said Mr. Sentence. "You are sacked from the theatre for I want you to take service with me. But I warn you that you will walk into danger—immense, incalculable danger. We work under cover, against a power which has not been measured, and we hunt but one man."

"Who is he, sir?" asked Billy.

"I don't know. He is called One over Seven in that Society of Seven who use the steel visiting cards, and among whom he is the Master of Masks."

Next day Billy received a letter from Mr. Sentence, telling him to go to the Hotel Magnifique in Paris. Billy went by aeroplane but was followed all the

way. His plane was shot down and his pilot killed but Billy managed to get clear and continue his journey by train.

Almost as soon as he reached the hotel a letter was handed to him. It contained one of those sinister, steel visiting cards on which was inscribed

1/
Partout.

One over Seven! And his address was "everywhere."

Billy's jaw suddenly set: "Show the gentleman up at once," he said.

One Over Seven.

THROBING minutes passed in the quiet and luxurious bedroom, and Billy's heart pulsed to their throbs as he waited for the dreaded One over Seven. Here, he thought, might be the end of his adventures with Mr. Sentence—before they had really started.

There was a tap at the door. It was the great moment. The door opened and a man walked into the room. As the door closed behind him Billy heard an obsequious voice say: "*Merci bien, monsieur.*" One over Seven was evidently a generous tipper.

Billy looked at him. He saw a face which gave him the instant impression of a dead and lifeless mask, a face which he knew was not the face of One over Seven.

It was deathly white, and so smooth that not a line nor a wrinkle showed anywhere on it, so that it was devoid of all personality. The mouth was curiously twisted, the lips reddened and thickened, and behind them were great teeth, broken and black here and there, hideous, like the fangs of a beast. The right side of the face was swollen just below the cheekbone into an immense, hard lump, which projected horribly. The eyes were strangely pale, an indefinite colour which was almost no colour at all, and they glinted from beneath heavy brows like those of an albino. The head was utterly hairless, and so cunning was the make-up that Billy, though he was close to the man, could not distinguish where the join ran between the real head of One over Seven and the covering which concealed his hair.

One over Seven spoke. He had a clear, shrill voice, that piped slightly.

"I see you are admiring my make-up, young man. I claim no credit for it myself. I was taught the art by the cleverest make-up man in the world. He could turn a giant into a hunchback dwarf, a handsome film hero into a thing too awful to look at. Observe myself. . . ." An evil grin revealed the jagged, hideous teeth.

"What do you want?" asked Billy. He was amazed at his own calmness of tone, and One over Seven was also obviously surprised.

"You're not afraid?" he asked. "After your journey, too."

Billy shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I be? I've had time, since I arrived here, to take precautions for my safety."

The strange eyes glinted evilly. One over Seven looked right and left sharply, and Billy realised that what he had intended as a flimsy protection for himself was taken as threat.

"Is this a trap?" hissed One over Seven, his hand moving towards his pocket. Then it relaxed and fell away. He smiled. "Perhaps. We shall see. Perhaps I, too, can lay traps." He spoke a little more loudly. "This—for the information of anybody who is listening. The Ambassador of Lithkrania is in my hands. He dies within half-an-hour of my death. Those have been my orders."

Billy nearly chuckled to himself as he heard this; but he kept a straight face and looked at the evil thing before him.

One over Seven went on. "And now, my boy, I want, as the newspaper interviewers say in America, you to tell me about yourself. Why are you in this? A page from a London theatre. Eh?"

Billy wondered how the interview would end. He had nothing to tell One over Seven, nothing at all; but he calculated that if he told nothing he would die.

He was thinking these things when One over Seven moved a pace nearer to him. As this step was taken there came to Billy's nostrils the unmistakable, cloying perfume which had been used to attract the great ape, Johann, to the kidnapping of the Lithkranian Ambassador. It sickened Billy. He knew he would never forget it.

One over Seven was staring at him . . . staring. He said, sharply: "Turn your face to the light, boy. Quickly."

Billy obeyed. He felt that he had to do so. One over Seven's gaze was now so concentrated and intense that Billy knew disobedience would be visited by swift retribution. The dreadful face was near to his own, the colourless eyes staring . . . staring. . . .

Billy heard One over Seven's breath go sharply through the mass of jagged, blackened teeth. Then the man stepped back from him, and asked a question in a quiet calm voice.

"Where were you born?"

"London, I think," said Billy, who saw no reason for refusing to reply.

"What was your father's occupation?"

Billy hesitated. He did not know. He had lost his father and mother at so early an age that he did not remember them. He told One over Seven this.

"I see. And you've lived in London with those Italians, Paolo and Maria Mantani, eh? For a long time?"

There was some menace in the voice, and Billy, thinking swiftly, lied almost on impulse.

"No. Only for two years. The people I lived with before died in an influenza epidemic, and I had to move." As he spoke, he had the sure knowledge that unless he could convince One over Seven of this, Paolo and Maria would be subjected to question, perhaps threats, probably danger.

He embroidered the swiftly conceived story. "As a matter of fact, I lived with a Belgian refugee and his wife. I had been in Belgium before then with them. They brought me over. They were old people and their name was Francard."

"Where did they live?" One over Seven's voice held a snarl.

Billy thought if he told him, he would be able to verify that the Francards had never existed, and that would bring him back on to Paolo and Maria.

"Is all this important to you?" he asked. "I'm tired of answering your questions and I'm not going to answer any more."

One over Seven was stepping closer when there was a tap on the door and the *valet de chambre* entered. "A telegram for *monsieur*," he said.

Billy took the telegram and met the eyes of One over Seven. They showed plainly that they intended to read that telegram, if possible.

"Wait a moment or two," Billy said to the *valet de chambre*. "There may be an answer."

He tore the telegram open and read:

Proceed 15 rue Salent, rue Lepic, Montmartre. Meet there Jules Debar. Listen to what he has to say and remember. If Debar has left, find him if possible. Important. Advise night visit. Tread carefully.

He looked up from reading this and heard a little cry. The *valet de chambre* was standing, his arms flung aloft. In the hand of One over Seven was a heavy pistol.

He said to Billy: "This man is a respectable French citizen. Probably the father of a family. You would not wish to see him killed because you refused to let me read that telegram, eh?"

Billy stood with the wire in his hand, wondering why he, too, had not been threatened. The valet's cheeks were very pale, and he was shaking badly. Death stared him in the face. Billy slowly crumpled the telegram into a tiny ball, pressing it as tightly as he could. Then he said: "Here you are."

There was gunshot. A bullet plugged the floor. One over Seven writhed, dropping the gun on which the valet had fastened a grip made fierce by desperation. The valet went staggering back, still holding the gun, under a terrific punch. Billy was plucked from his hold as a ripe apple might be picked from a stalk.

The door opened—slammed . . . the key clicked. "Murderer!" the valet cried. "I shall catch him." He brandished the gun, a very bold man now that danger had passed.

Billy grinned: "I'll bet you won't, but you can try. I've got what I wanted."

He opened his hand to disclose the little rolled up ball of paper which had broken One over Seven's guard. He burnt it before the fascinated eyes of the valet who, for the moment, had forgotten all his anger.

The Mad Singer.

THAT night Billy went to 15 rue Salent. It was, as the telegram told him, in the neighbourhood of the rue Lepic off the Boulevard de Clichy, away up in Montmartre. He went at about ten o'clock, when Montmartre was not yet wakened for the night, and he stood for a moment or two outside the Moulin Rouge and gazed about him.

He looked up the rue Lepic. It was wide and dark and tree-lined, seeming to yawn away into an unfathomable maw of blackness which made him shudder.

Billy went down the rue Lepic, and he struck into some twisted ways beyond it, dark and noisome turnings, where his footfalls echoed eerily.

At last he reached the rue Salent. It was a narrow gap, diving in darkness between two rows of those tall and completely shuttered houses which are typical of that part of Paris. On a wall corner a lamp shed a fitful, uncertain light.

Billy slid into this cut, going along by the wall. He wondered what Mr. Sentence was doing, and why he was despatched on these missions.

It took him a little while to locate No. 15, for the doors of the houses were so dark, and he had to use his electric torch several times before he was successful. The door of No. 15 was wide open.

Billy hesitated, peering inside. He saw only darkness. He called:

"Is anybody there?" His voice held a strange, quick catch. Nobody answered him. He stepped inside.

There was a room immediately inside, and he tried its door. The door opened. The room beyond was lighted, and a man was sitting at its table. He was playing patience with a greasy pack of cards, and he was the most horrible creature Billy had ever seen. He probably weighed twenty stone. He sat, a vast mass of obesity, huddled down in a specially



GIVING 'EM THE SLIP.—Billy suddenly wriggled from the gunman's grasp and leaped for the balustrade. A bullet whistled past his head as he went sliding swiftly down.

He tossed it through the air. Deftly, One over Seven caught it with his free hand. That was all right. But smoothing the telegram out was another matter. Two hands were needed. He moved the little ball of paper towards his gun-hand and started trying to pick at it with his finger and thumb.

Then he looked up. "I shall take it away with me," he said, looking at Billy.

And, in that moment, the one chance on which Billy had counted materialised. The desperate valet hurled himself at One over Seven, and Billy came in after him like a terrier.

wide chair. His hairless head gleamed with perspiration, and he had a pink patch over one eye.

He took no notice of Billy. He was watching his cards. "*Pardon, monsieur,*" Billy said. Still the man did not look round. Billy then realised he was stone deaf. He walked into the room.

The man became aware of his presence and stood up with a quick, strange, unhuman cry, and revealed himself as not more than five feet in height, so that he rolled on his feet like an awful sort of barrel that had life and two short, thick legs. Billy realised something else. He was dumb as well as deaf.

Billy smiled at him. The tiny sunken eyes surveyed the boy with deep suspicion, and when he put his hand in his pocket, one of the thick hands slid towards a monstrous hip and the flat knife that lay there. But Billy produced nothing more dangerous than a pocket-book and on one of its pages he wrote: *Jules Debar, s'il vous plait!*

The tiny eyes lighted. A thick finger stabbed upwards, towards the ceiling. Then three fingers were held up. Billy did not know whether this meant Room No. 3 or the third floor, so he wrote another question and a thick finger indicated the word *floor* on his page. Billy smiled his thanks and began to ascend a narrow staircase.

As he took its first turn, two men slid in from the street. The deaf mute was back at his cards, and he never saw the bludgeon which, striking the back of his head, felled him forward against the table, senseless. The two men went up the stairs treading like cats.

Meanwhile Billy had come to the third floor of the strange and awful dark house. It was absolutely silent, and his fears mounted as he trod higher. On the top landing—he had had to use his torch all the way—there were three rooms, and from behind the door of one of these rooms came a man's voice singing. Billy thought this man might tell him where Debar could be found, even if he were not Debar, so he tapped on the door.

The singing ceased. The room was silent. Suddenly the door was whipped open and the muzzle of a long revolver was thrust against Billy's chest. Behind the revolver was a wild-eyed and haggard man clad only in a shirt—open at the neck—and a pair of trousers hitched about his waist by a belt.

"If you're from The Seven . . ." he began.
"I'm not," said Billy. "Thinking it safe, he added: "I'm from Mr. Sentence."

Debar—for Billy knew this must be the man he sought—looked him over and then laughed. "Come in," he said. "I'm Debar. I asked them to see me. See? I wrote a clever letter—only a day or so ago. See? I said send somebody. I can tell you something. . . ." He passed his hand vaguely through his hair. "But sit down."

Billy seated himself on a chair in the barely furnished room, and as he did so the two men who had knocked out the fat concierge, arrived at the door and settled down to listen.

Debar was going on. "Years . . . hunted. See? Because I knew the secret. Hunted . . . death at my heels. See? A little farm near Caen. Burnt, nearly killed myself. Marseilles. Nearly killed in the Old Port. Here . . . over the river . . . rue St Jacques. Tired of it now. No more. You listen."

He suddenly began to sing again. Questioning this hunted man would be futile, Billy decided. Debar ceased to sing as suddenly as he had started, and he roared with laughter.

"Karl was cunning. You know Karl. Karl Wertzheim. In Brussels, snug and safe. Yes. . . . Clever. Friend of mine so I didn't go near him, didn't draw them on him. Good man, Karl. Nice

little house, too. You call on him when you're there. Say you're my friend. Thirty-three rue Galon. You go. Fine fellow. He knows all about . . ."

Debar's voice sank and he looked round. He added, in a hoarse whisper: "All about the Rat Trap. And . . . The Rat." Debar chuckled and rubbed his hands together. "Like a rat in a trap, he used to say. Just that. Like a rat in a trap."

Billy's brain had repeated again and again the name and address of Karl Wertzheim, until it could not forget it. Now he asked: "What is the Rat Trap?"

Debar's eyes opened wide. "You don't know? Why it's . . ."

The door of the room was flung wide open and the two men stepped in. They were both well-dressed, quiet men. One of them held a pistol in his hand. Its muzzle was encased in a curious cylinder.

He lifted this gun and Billy heard three *plops*, as though three champagne corks had been swiftly extracted from three bottles. Jules Debar uttered a little cry and slid from his chair to the floor.

Debar, in those last moments, had a return of sanity. His eyes were quite clear as they looked up at Billy. He tried to speak.

"Tell him . . . Stahn . . . Stahn . . ." He could not complete that, whatever it might have been. He suddenly shouted: "Snow and dark trees, and great mountains . . . See? Schloss . . ." His head fell back.

The gunman said to his companion: "Take him away." He flicked his hand towards Billy as he spoke, and he walked across to Debar's bed.

The other man dragged Billy out to the landing. He kept his hand on the boy's shoulder, and he pulled a gun as they walked.

"Go quietly," he said, in English tinged with a slight foreign accent, "and you won't be hurt. We want you . . . badly . . ."

They descended the first flight of stairs. The rest went zig-zagging downwards into the pit below, and, seeing them, Billy thought of something which only a boy can properly accomplish without risk.

He suddenly wriggled from the man's grip and leapt on to the steep balustrade. This was worn to satin smoothness by countless hands over many years. Even as the man cried out, Billy went sliding downwards like a plummet.

The gun boomed over his head. In the darkness the bullet missed. Billy landed on his feet on the lower landing, leapt to the next balustrade and went sliding down that.

He reached the street before his captor had arrived at the first landing, and he fled for his life, telling himself he had to reach Brussels without delay, to see Karl Wertzheim before the two men who killed Debar reached him.

He had about fifty pounds all told. Flying was quickest, but he had to get to Le Bourget, and the telephone would be at work; the French airport would be watched.

He ran through the rue Lepic, found a taxi and was driven to the railway station. There was no train to Brussels that night. He asked feverish questions of the inquiry clerk, and was directed to a big car hire agency.

But that visit to the station had been a mistake. They had guessed he would go either to railway station or airport, and they had split—the two men—one travelling to Le Bourget as fast as he could and the other to the station. The man who had come to the station was on Billy's heels when he rode to hire his car.

After much bargaining, he secured a big Delage,

fast and powerful, with a closed body. It roared away from the gates of Paris and struck north-east, heading for the frontier and Belgium and Brussels.

And after it came another car, just as fast, just as powerful. It carried three men, and each man was armed.

Pursuit.

THEY had not travelled far before Billy realised they were followed. He told his driver this, urging him to hold on. The driver gave his big machine full throttle and smashed away down the straight, tree-lined roads at seventy.

But the machine behind held them. They came into a village. To Billy's dismay his man put on his brakes and said: "I go no further. I am a peaceful citizen. I demand no adventures. I shall see the gendarme here." He got down, and Billy was about to do the same when an idea came to him.

"Do me a favour," he said. "When you pulled up I ran away. Is that clear?" He slipped a hundred-franc note into the man's hand.

"All right," said the driver after a momentary pause, and Billy slipped into the shadows.

He was just in time. The other car thundered into the straight, saw the stationary machine, and pulled up with a scream of brakes. Two men got out and approached the driver.

"Where's that boy?" one of them demanded roughly.

The driver visibly stiffened. He resented the aggression in the man's tone.

"The little boy. Oh, he ran away. Where . . . ? Police, he said. And my hire not paid. Pout! I wait for the police. I'll police him when he comes back with them."

His questioner turned and spoke to the two inside the car. "We've got to hit Brussels, and quick. We've ditched the kid, anyhow. C'mon." He spoke coarse English. He bundled into the car, and as it started forward the driver of the hired machine saw Billy run from the shadows and leap like a cat to the back carrier of the moving machine, which thundered on out of sight—Brussels bound.

After about a quarter-of-an-hour's riding Billy began to understand that he would never keep his hold of the carrier until they reached Brussels.

However, he clung for all he was worth, his fingers numbed and aching, his body cramped.

Suddenly the quick even drum of the powerful exhaust below him was broken. It began to splutter. They were, beyond all doubt, running out of petrol. As Billy thought this, the car came to a standstill.

There was the clatter of tins. Billy realised his danger too late. A man came round the end of the car to the petrol tank and so saw Billy, perched above that receptacle. The boy was limed in the light from the headlamps of an approaching car.

The man yelled as the boy slipped off the carrier.

He dropped the cans and had Billy in a flash.

"Well, if you don't beat everything, kid," said the man who spoke coarse English. "Jumped our carrier way back there, eh? Smart I call it."

A number of the tall, narrow cans, in which the French keep their petrol, were brought out of the car and a man began to fill up the big tank. The following machine was now fairly close, and the English-speaking fellow addressed Billy.

"There's a car coming," he said. "Maybe it'll



CAUGHT ON THE CARRIER.—At sight of Billy the man gave a yell and dived forward. In a flash he had the boy, who was too stiff and cramped to move swiftly.

pull up; maybe it won't. Whatever it does, you'll keep quiet and be good. My friends and me have all got guns and if you want to condemn the people in that car to death, you shout. That's all."

The overtaking car was obviously going to stop, and stop it did. A man got out. He wore plus fours and a check cap, and he giggled.

"I say," he said—and as he spoke, Billy saw he was alone—"can I be of any help?"

The man was Mr. Brame Sentence, and he did not once glance at Billy as he approached them.

At last the Secret Service man has appeared! Single-handed can he help Billy? Can they get clear together? Look out for amazing adventures in next week's thrill-filled incidents.

THE MARCH OF THE WEED MEN

(Continued from page 33.)

For pandemonium reigned. There came the shouts and shrieks of the servants; the crashing of glass and the splintering of woodwork. The Weed Men, guided by the crooks, were sweeping through the house like a tornado, plundering, robbing, carrying all before them.

One fact soon became noticeable. The Weed Men, completely guided by the wills of the crooks at first, were now assuming an independence; they were not obeying the orders of Killer Grogan and his men so readily. Furthermore, they were looking more and more human—and in that very process, they became a thousandfold more horrifying. For as they grew less like weeds, and more like Men, they increased in height, their trunk-like legs attained a new freedom, their arms were less like tree branches, and more like animal tentacles.

There are dozens of the hideous monstrosities—an army. They were marching in unison, and having swept through Melford Lodge, they took to the main road, increasing their speed, loping along purposefully.

"The town—the town!" cried Tony, in horror. "Don't you understand, Hugh? They're making for the town—and they'll kill everybody they meet!"

"By Jingo!" panted Hugh. "The footpath, Tony old man! If we take the footpath, we can reach the town first, and give the warning."

Wild with excitement, the two boys sped off. Fleet of foot they raced along a well-known footpath—a short cut to the town. When they arrived in the quaint, old-fashioned High Street, they found the street lamps already gleaming, and people were going about their business, totally unconscious of the menace which was even then threatening the community.

"The Weed Men—the Weed Men!" shouted Hugh and Tony, as they ran through the High Street. "The Weed Men are coming! Run, everybody—run!"

The boys were halted by a number of men who ran across the road and seized them.

"What's wrong, young 'un?" asked one man sharply. "What are you talking about?"

"The Weed Men are coming—they are marching on the town!" shouted Tony. "Get the women and children indoors—"

"Look!" yelled Hugh, pointing.

Shouts of consternation arose, for, at that moment, the Army of Weed Men were entering the town, and the sight of those monstrous figures, in the light of the street lamps, was terrifying beyond measure. Shrieks were already going up, and people were running, panic-stricken in every direction. But, thanks to the boys' warning, most of the inhabitants were enabled to get clear of the main road in time.

Crash—splinter—crash! Urged on by the crooks,

the monsters went through the High Street, smashing the shop windows, and plundering to right and to left. But even Killer Red Grogan and his men were frightened now; the Weed Men were getting out of their control. The vile creatures, in fact, were running amok.

Crack—crack—crack! *Bang—bang—bang!* Some of the bolder men, armed with rifles and shot-guns, were putting up an intensive fight. But they might as well have attempted to stop the march of a fleet of army tanks. The bullets and the shot had no effect whatever against the monsters.

Nick the Pole was hit, however, and he fell screaming to the ground, to be trampled underfoot by the oncoming Weed Men. Battered and half-dead, he was dragged aside. Janson was the next to fall, and, screaming with fear, he surrendered.

Killer Red Grogan, left in sole command of the Weed Men army knew—now that it was too late—that he had embarked upon a hopeless enterprise.

The excitement increased; men with great stakes charged to the attack, only to be beaten aside. The Weed Men, possessing the strength of giants, swept their opponents aside, injuring many and wreaking dreadful havoc.

As it was, Dr. Charlton appeared on the scene—and the scientist-explorer, knowing the exact nature of the peril, had come prepared.

"Stand aside, everybody!" he shouted urgently. *Snap!* He switched on a blinding orange-coloured ray from a clumsy looking machine he was carrying. That ray was not dangerous to human life, but it was death to weeds. In the Amazon wilds, Dr. Charlton had seen creepers and festoons of weeds shrivel and die under the magic of that ray.

"They're falling—they're shrivelling up!" went up the cry. "Hurrah!"

It was true. As the orange-coloured ray struck the Weed Men, so they shrank, they shrivelled and fell writhing to the ground, every atom of life destroyed.

So it was left to Dr. Grant Charlton to kill the monstrous creatures which he, himself, had created. When that grim work was accomplished, he burned the Klissani-Kla seeds which remained in his possession, and he destroyed, in the same flames, the last remaining drop of the "Human Life Elixir," the secret of which had been given to him by Yikk, the Indian witch doctor of the Amazon.

One excellent result came from the startling adventure. Killer Red Grogan, Janson, and Nick the Pole were captured by the police, and received a just sentence for their crimes.

Johnny Gee & Co., the cheery heroes of St. Giddy's, return next week in a ripping school yarn. One long chukka from beginning to end, chaps.

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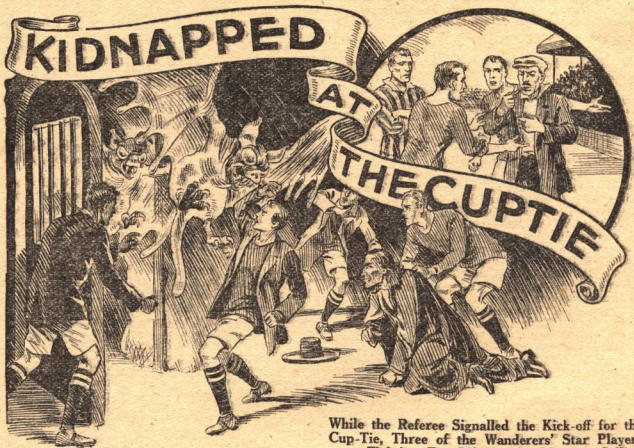
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THE TIN-CAN TROJANS IN
THE STADIUM OF SPECTRES.

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the Grand Yarn Below.



The Football Wizards.

CLICK-click-click! The turnstiles were going merrily as the people from Welham Town poured into the newly transformed Crater—the stronghold of Welham Wanderers, the most amazing football club in England.

For this team of schoolboys, consisting actually of the twelve adopted sons of Lord Welham, the eccentric scientist-peer, had been making football history. The "Miracle Boys" had battled their way successfully through to the sixth round of the English Cup Competition; and to-day they were drawn to play against Portstown, one of the greatest teams of the south. It would be a miracle, indeed, should the boys survive the gruelling ordeal of this cup-tie. If they *did* win, they would earn the right to play in the semi-finals.

One fact in their favour was that they were playing at home—in their own novel stadium. This was a natural rock formation in the Derbyshire Hills, situated, in fact, on the estate of Welham Priors, Lord Welham's famous country seat.

So great had the fame of the boys become that tens of thousands of people were coming out to the Crater to-day, to witness this titanic struggle. Lord Welham had insisted upon his "sons" doing all the work of the arena, and since their last cup-tie game the Tin-Can Trojans had transformed the Crater.

They had improved the terracing, and railings had been erected, turnstiles fixed, and now that natural arena was looking like a perfectly equipped stadium. There was no grand-stand—there had been no time to erect such a luxury—but there was ample accommodation for a crowd of fifty thousand.

The boys had proved themselves to be footballers

While the Referee Signalled the Kick-off for the Cup-Tie, Three of the Wanderers' Star Players were Fighting For Life in the Mystery Cellars below the Crater.

of such outstanding brilliance that football fans from all parts of the country wanted to see them. No longer did people look on the Trojans as a joke.

There had been strange and weird happenings at the Crater, of late—but the public did not know that far beneath the playing pitch there existed a great cavern. This had actually been created, scores of years ago, by the fall of a gigantic meteorite. The very crater itself had been originally formed by that hurtling body from Outer Space. Professor Mortimer Zorro, the famous archaeologist, had been working in the district for years; but only Lord Welham and his boys knew that Zorro was really the leader of a desperate gang of crooks, and that he controlled various monstrous creatures which had remained dormant in the meteorite since its fall. Zorro, by scientific methods, had "hatched" these unearthly monsters, and was using them in his crooked work.

While the crowds poured into the football stadium Professor Zorro stood far below, in the secret cavern. In the flickering light of strange flares, Zorro, with his gaunt, lean frame, his loosely hanging arms, and his scraggy neck, looked more like some grotesque insect than a human being. Round about him stood half-a-dozen men clothed in tight-fitting grey, with bird-like masks, which gave them the appearance of possessing enormous beaks.

"You have your orders!" Zorro was saying. "There is big money in the stadium to-day—and it shall be ours. Go! Act at the right moment, and

report to me later. I have other work to do—for I am determined that the boys shall be beaten this day."

The Grey Men drifted away without a word. This place was their headquarters, and they could well understand Zorro's concern. The more famous the Crater became, the greater the risk of discovery—for Zorro. To-day he was determined to get rid of the boys.

* * * * *

AJAX, the Mighty, was having a last word with his team.

"Portstown are a mighty hot team, brothers," he was saying. "If we keep cool we shall win our way through to the semi-final. It's going to be a hard game, but we're in tip-top form, and we ought to win."

"We're going to win!" said Argus, the brilliant centre-forward.

"Rather!" chorused the others.

They were fine, well-set-up youngsters, these boys. There was some excuse, indeed, for Lord Welham's fad in naming them after mythological Greek heroes. In their footie togs, with their clean, muscular limbs, they looked like veritable gods.

It was within five minutes of the kick-off, and Portstown were in another part of the log-building, which served as a dressing-room for both teams. Suddenly the door opened, and Themis, the reserve "Miracle Boy," came in. He was looking wildly excited and anxious.

"Ajax! Ajax!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"What is it?" asked Ajax. He was not only the captain of the team, but the manager and the recognised leader.

"You'd better come and have a look at the rocks, just behind the hut, here," said Themis. "There's an opening—a great gap—and there might be a terrible fall of rock. Thousands of people are on either side, and if anything happened—"

"All right, I'll come," said Ajax, giving a quick, significant glance at Eos and Argus.

They seemed to understand, for they went straight out with their leader. Themis accompanied them. Ajax knew only too well that Themis was, in some way, influenced by Zorro—and he was deeply suspicious, now, of a trick.

The four boys were unobserved as they made their way behind the log structure and climbed the rugged rocks. No terracing had been made here, for the rocks were far too huge and cumbersome.

"There!" said Themis, pointing to a great gap. "That wasn't here this morning, was it? It looks like a subsidence to me. Don't you think we'd better go in and explore?"

"An excellent idea!" said a grim, mocking voice. The boys swung round—and there, facing them, with an automatic pistol in his grasp, was Professor Mortimer Zorro.

The Cup-tie Sensation.

"**I**NSIDE!" hissed Zorro ominously. "Make an outcry, and I will shoot. This gun is silent, and no attention will be attracted. Quick! Do as I order!"

There was no help for it. Ajax gave a glance at Argus and Eos, and they plunged into the cavity which appeared to be the entrance of a tunnel.

They stumbled on, Zorro behind them. The boys were filled with anxiety, for it was within a few minutes of the kick-off, and the team had no reserves other than Themis.

Having gone down a twisting, narrow tunnel, which sloped steeply, they presently came into the great cavern which they had previously entered, from a different direction.

Abruptly, Ajax went into action. Back-stepping

quickly, he hooked his leg round Zorro's, and with a sharp tug he had the Professor flat on his back.

"On him!" yelled Ajax.

In a flash, Argus and Eos had piled on top of Zorro. With one grab, Ajax got possession of the gun, and flung it far away, across the cavern.

"You young fools!" snarled Zorro. "This madness will do you no good."

"You tricked us, Professor," said Ajax contemptuously, "by means of Themis—one of our own friends."

"And do you know why?" gloated Zorro, almost beside himself. "I will tell you! Themis is my own son—my own flesh and blood!"

Ajax, Eos and Argus were horrified, for they had never guessed at that relationship.

"It's true—it's true!" muttered Themis. "Zorro is my father. But I could not help myself, Ajax. His power over me—"

"I understand," said Ajax grimly. "Well, we'll see to it, in future, that he cannot 'control' you. You owe nothing to him—he abandoned you as a baby, and our own Chief is your legal guardian."

Zorro's rage had deprived him of his hold over Themis; and the boy, pale-faced, was now full of eagerness.

"This way!" he panted. "I'll show you what to do with the Professor. He had a prison ready planned for you—and you shall put him into it."

He quickly led the way across the cavern to a deep recess—a kind of cell, the front of which was guarded by a great barred door.

"No, no!" screamed Zorro.

But Themis flung back the bolts, and threw the barred door wide open. Instantly, from the black interior of the cavity came a number of great, fluttering creatures. They were pale, mysterious, jelly-like objects, transparent and ghostly. Yet they had something of the shape of bats; they were armed with wicked claws and venomous fangs.

"The bats—the transparent bats!" gasped Ajax, fighting madly.

The things were attacking him and his companions. They knew, in a moment, that these horrors were freshly hatched Space Monsters. The boys had seen others—a hundred times larger. These young bats, undoubtedly, had but lately been hatched from the egg stage.

The Space Monsters did not attack Zorro, but confined their activities to the boys. With a snarl of triumph, the crook-professor flung the boys into the cell-like cavity. *Clang!* The barred door closed, and the bolts were shot.

The boys were prisoners. Professor Zorro had triumphed!

* * * * *

OUTSIDE, in the March sunshine, the great crowds were growing impatient. It was time for the kick-off, and the teams were on the field; the referee and the linesmen were ready. But three members of the home team were missing! There had been a frantic search, but Ajax, the captain, and Argus and Eos were missing.

"I will give them five minutes," said the referee, looking at his watch. "Ajax is the captain, and he knows the time. If he and the other two men are not here within five minutes, the game starts."

"But we can't play with only eight men!" protested Perseus, agast.

The referee looked up at the packed terraces of the Crater. He looked upon a veritable sea of faces. The great crowds were shouting and cheering impatiently—failing to understand the reason for the delay.

"We must start," said the referee grimly. "I

is only fair to the Portstown players. They are here on time—ready and waiting. If you have only eight men, it is your own misfortune."

The five minutes slipped away. . . . Still there was no sign of Ajax, Argus or Eos. Even Themis, the one reserve player was missing, too.

Amid roars of protests, and great shouts of excitement, the referee ordered the teams to line up; he blew his whistle for the start. Thus the great cup-tie began—with Portstown at full strength, and Welham Wanderers fielding only eight men.

The Portstown players were none too pleased;

Zorro was standing. He was watching the game, and gloating. With him stood Themis—for Zorro believed that the boy was still completely under his control. Quite suddenly, however, something had seemed to snap within Themis's brain. His loyalty to his "brothers" was greater than Zorro's will-power.

"That's the third goal against those infernal boys!" purred Zorro. "Do you understand, Themis, my son? They have lost! Their reputations is in tatters! They will sink into the oblivion from which they emerged.



FOILED BY THE FUMES.—The Transparent Bats shot up from the rocks. At the same moment the maroons exploded, great clouds of smoke spread and the bats were blotted out of sight.

and the captain, indeed, had suggested a further wait. They were sportsmen, these First League footballers, and they did not want to take any unfair advantage over their youthful opponents. But the referee remained firm.

A breathless silence fell upon the vast multitude as the game began in earnest. Phosperus had gone into goal, with Hesperus acting as pivot. Nike and Dike were in their own positions of outside-left and outside-right respectively. Perseus took the centre-forward position—although he usually played inside-right. The boys were unable to settle down. Without Ajax, in fact, the team was utterly disorganised.

The result was inevitable.

Within a minute, Portstown, slicing clean through the Miracle Boys' defence, had opened the scoring. A groan went up from the local supporters. The teams lined up again; from the kick-off, the ball went soaring out to the wing; it was centred smartly, the Portstown forwards were away. Boreas and Eurus battled hard, but it was useless. Again the defence was pierced, and again Portstown scored.

Two goals within two minutes!

And within a rock cavity, on that part of the terracing which was not occupied by the crowds,

"It is not yet too late!" said Themis in a strange, strained voice.

Zorro swung round—but he was too late. For Themis, no longer controlled by the scientist-crook's will, had picked up a great chunk of hard rock. With tremendous force he brought it down upon the side of Zorro's head, and without a groan the Professor sank to the rocky floor of the tunnel.

Themis, who had been the unconscious cause of trapping his comrades, had turned the tables.

The Miracle Boys Win Through.

HALF-TIME! The Trojans, three goals down, were, at this period, a beaten side. Nothing short of a miracle now could rob Portstown of their triumph—and their right to play in the semi-finals.

Throughout the Crater, the Trojans' supporters were making loud protests. They declared that the game was unfair. With only eight men, how could the Miracle Boys hope to show what they could really do?

Tied to the railings, all the way round the field, were numbers of giant maroons. Enthusiasts were standing ready—for they had planned to signalise a victory for the Miracle Boys with a cannonade of explosions. But it now appeared that those triumphant maroons would never be fired.

The brief interval was over. The teams were lining up again. . . . Suddenly a shout went up; a

great, exultant shout. Three figures were running on to the field, a giant of a youth in the lead. Ajax the Mighty himself! Behind him came Argus and Eos.

"Hurrah!"

"They've come—they've come!"

The cheering was tumultuous. The other players swarmed round Ajax, asking him what had happened, where they had been.

"There's no time for explanations now," replied Ajax grimly. "We're three goals down—and we've got to make good! I'm relying on you to play as you've never played before!"

"We'll do our best!" promised Perseus breathlessly.

The game had not been in progress a minute before Ajax, as if to set the example, trapped the ball and streaked through. Ajax saw his chance, and, like a streak of greased lightning, he defeated opponent after opponent, running hard. He steadied himself.

Slam! The leather left his foot, it soared goalwards, and it flashed past the custodian like a cannon-ball!

"Well played, Ajax!"

Two minutes later, Argus, the centre-forward, added another goal. With machine-like precision, the Miracle Boys moved to the attack, controlling the ball in their own inimitable way. From the wing came the leather. With a jump Argus was upon it. He took a shot, low and curling, a winner all the way.

"Goal!"

The miracle was happening! With only a few minutes of the second half gone, the Trojans had already netted twice. Portstown, previously so supremely confident, became ragged. Instead of concentrating upon attack, they packed their defence—tactics that were of no avail against the wizard-like skill of the Miracle Boys.

In the cavern, meanwhile, Zorro recovered consciousness, to find himself in the cell with the barred door.

He did not remain a prisoner long, however, for the Grey Men returned, full of triumph. They had raided the main paybox, after the other money-takers had handed in their heavy bags of silver and bundles of notes. The crooks, in fact, had stolen the entire takings, which amounted to some thousands of pounds. Ordinarily, Zorro would not have gone after such a prize; but he was out to harass the Miracle Boys in every possible way.

Zorro, upon his release, was like a madman. The boys had escaped him—he had lost his power over Themis—and the Trojans were now winning.

"The bats—the giant bats!" he almost screamed. "Release them."

"But, master!" panted one of the Grey Men. "People will see; they will know the secret of the crater."

"Let them know!" snarled Zorro. "The bats will spread such terror and panic that hundreds of people will be trampled to death. The game will be stopped. And those infernal boys will be discredited and ruined. Release the bats, I say!"

Not daring to disobey, the Grey Men went off to attend to the grim work.

"GOAL!"

It was Argus again—Argus with one of his delightful first-time shots. How the crowds cheered! For the valiant boys, fighting gamely, had drawn level. The score stood—3-3!

Only five minutes to go. Ajax, playing the game of his life, controlled his team magnificently. From one of his forward passes Perseus now had the leather. Unselfishly, he looked round, but Argus was marked by two of the Portstown defenders. Perseus leapt onwards.

"Shoot—shoot!" screamed the crowds.

Perseus shot. Valiantly the Portstown goalie dived at the hurtling leather. He punched out, but Argus's head was ready, and back came the ball—back into the net.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

Never had there been such a tumult. The Miracle Boys were leading. Dozens of supporters ignited the fuses of the great maroons.

At that very moment the great Transparent Bats shot upwards from the rocks—to cast terror and panic upon the throng. But the panic never developed.

For as the Transparent Bats, looking grotesque and weird, soared aloft, so the great maroons burst, the reports being like the explosions of artillery. Great clouds of smoke spread. And in all that excitement the Terror Bats were not even seen; they were smothered by the smoke. The bats themselves, frightened, were flying into the upper air.

And Professor Mortimer Zorro cursed helplessly. The game was won, and the disaster was averted by the crowds themselves—all unconsciously.

The Miracle Boys were in the semi-finals.

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He told me that if the seeds were planted in a certain temperature, the plants would grow to an enormous size within a few days. Upon my word! He was right—for I only planted these seeds three days ago, and look at the result!"

"Are the plants of any use, Dad?" asked Tony. "They might be," said Dr. Charlton, a strange light coming into his eyes. "I have made up my mind to try an experiment—an amazing, revolutionary experiment."

"Listen!" said Hugh suddenly. "What's that rustling noise?"

He was staring intently down the great hothouse, but Tony was examining one of the weeds, and his father was preoccupied.

"It's nothing," said the latter impatiently. "Possibly the growth of the Klissani-Kla plants. If you watch, I daresay you will actually see them increase in size."

But he was wrong. For he and his sons were not alone.

Three men lurked in a corner of the great forcing-house. Tropical ferns, of enormous size and luxurious growth, effectively screened them from view.

Little did Dr. Charlton realise, as he moved about, that he was kept constantly covered by the muzzle of a wicked-looking automatic pistol. For the men behind the ferns were crooks of the most desperate character—Killer Red Grogan, the bandit, and his murderous assistants, Janson and Nick the Pole. The night before these men had broken into the local bank at Melford Marley—the town, a mile distant. With their loot the crooks had fled—but, instead of making a clean getaway, they had broken into the grounds of Melford Lodge, and had sought refuge in the great hothouse, where they had lain low.

Through the screen of ferns the daring criminals could see everything that was going on—whilst they themselves remained effectually hidden. Dr. Charlton had taken from his pocket a small hypodermic syringe and a little glass phial. Very carefully, he charged the instrument with the liquid from the little bottle.

"What are you going to do, Dad?" asked Tony curiously.

His father turned a pair of eager eyes upon him. "I am about to try a little experiment, my boy," he said softly. "For many months I have worked on this remarkable serum. The secret of it was given to me by Yikk, the Indian witch doctor. The literal translation of the Indian name is 'Human Life Elixir.' The weird old witch-doctor assured me that this serum, when injected into plants of certain types, rapidly produced startling changes in those plants."

"What sort of changes, dad?" asked Hugh uneasily. "I don't quite like the sound of it. It—it seems so uncanny."

"I must confess, boys, that I really do not know," replied Dr. Charlton, "for this serum is new to science. However, there can be no harm in making an experiment."

He took the hypodermic syringe and, with a swift movement of the plunger, he injected the needle into one of the grotesque Klissani-Kla plants. And the plant, from its very root upwards, seemed to shudder and quiver.

The Horror of the Hothouse.

"GREAT Scott! Did—did you notice anything, Dad?" asked Tony breathlessly.

"Strange!" muttered the scientist. "Yes, Tony, I did notice something. But it may have been a mere spasm caused by the pressure I applied."

But he stared almost fascinatedly at the Klissani-

Kla plant. Nothing happened, however. But Dr. Charlton carefully laid the hypodermic syringe aside, together with the little phial of serum.

"It is well nigh incredible," he said, looking up and down the great hothouse. "Yesterday there was nothing. To-day—there are these gigantic growths, neither weed nor fungus, but something between the two. I am beginning to think that that old witch doctor of the Amazon was something of a magician. Well, we can do nothing further now. This evening, perhaps, we will come back—and see if there is any further development."

They left the hothouse, Dr. Charlton closing and locking the door after him. For two or three minutes there was a tense silence; then at last one of the hidden crooks spoke.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "I'm glad the old boy explained these blamed weeds! So that's why they grew so quickly during the night?"

"We're quite safe, Janson," murmured Killer Grogan, with a chuckle. "You heard what the old fossil said? They're not coming back until to-night."

"Pity there's nothing to eat in this hole," said Janson gruffly.

The three crooks paid no further attention to the great weeds. They made themselves more comfortable, and Nick the Pole, at least, fell into a sleep. The others, behind the screen of ferns, felt lazily comfortable, too, for the temperature within the hothouse was conducive to slumber. So the hours passed.

Swish-swish—swish-swish!

"Gosh! What's that?" whispered Janson nervously. "There's something moving out there, Red!"

"Don't be a fool," retorted the Killer. "The door hasn't been unlocked, and—"

He broke off with a sharp gasp, for at that moment he had parted the ferns, and was taking a look into the main body of the hothouse. What he saw caused his shifty eyes to bulge, and the colour to flee from his evil face.

The giant weed which Dr. Charlton had treated with the "Human Life Elixir" was writhing, fantastically, going into all manner of contortions, as though imbued with some devilish life. Nick the Pole was awake by now, and he and his companions, parting the ferns, stared in terror.

Before any of them could make any other comment, an astounding thing happened. With a tremendous wrenching and tearing, the great weed jerked itself free of the ground, coming up completely by the roots! It staggered into the wide pathway, and stood there like something alive, swaying, its roots slithering on the stonework.

Incredibly enough, the great weed had now taken on the vague appearance of something half-human, half-animal. It towered for ten or twelve feet, and the lower "limbs" were like great legs; two sprouting branches, which came out of the trunk, were waving uncertainly to and fro, and the sprouting growths at the ends of the branches were not unlike great fingers. Perched at the top was a bulbous shape, and it seemed to the terrified crooks that a vague thing, like a caricature of a human head, was forming.

"Run—run!" screamed Nick the Pole.

He was panic-stricken—as, indeed, were his companions. For that fantastic weed had taken on a life of its own; it was a thing of unutterable horror. A Weed Man!

As the crooks moved from behind the screen of ferns, the giant weed slithered forward, its movements not unlike those of a great animal. There was no escape. The men would have to pass the monstrosity if they were to escape from the forcing-house

Thud—thud—thud!

Killer Red Grogan had pulled out a heavy, automatic pistol, fitted with a silencer. He fired again and again, and the bullets thudded harmlessly into the fibrous trunk of the Weed Man.

"Back—back!" panted Grogan hoarsely.

He was talking to his companions, but it was the Weed Man which obeyed. It halted and then it shifted backwards. The three men watched with sudden wonder—with relief. For that thing, that vile weed growth, was heading—was obeying!



THE GHOUL OF THE GLASSHOUSE.—Dr. Charlton and the boys halted in horror. For from the hothouse burst a fantastic weed-like shape that yet resembled a human being.

Red Grogan was no coward, and now that he had recovered his scattered wits, he moved forward.

"Back!" he commanded sternly. "Move away from me, you infernal monster!"

It was his tone, rather than his words, which had the effect. The Weed Man did not hesitate, it shrank away, slithering on the stones, backing as commanded.

"It obeys—it obeys!" gloated Red Grogan.

As he spoke the words an idea came to him—so fantastic and as grotesque as anything that had yet happened. With burning eyes, Red Grogan seized Dr. Charlton's hypodermic syringe. He charged it from the phial, and with an evil chuckle, he injected another of the great weeds. He went from plant to plant, injecting them all.

"Have you gone mad?" panted Janson in horror.

"No!" gloated Killer Grogan. "But these things are slaves in our hands—and here we have a small army of them—ready to do our bidding!"

The Might of the Weed Men.

CRASH—bang—crash!

"Dad! What can that be?" asked Hugh Charlton, in wonder.

He and Tony were just setting out from the house in the dusk of the evening to visit the hothouse again.

"It's very strange," said Dr. Charlton, frowning. "That was the cracking of glass—and the sounds came from the hothouse itself! What on earth can it mean?"

"Look!" shouted Tony suddenly. "Oh, Dad!"

They all stood stock still on the garden pathway; Dr. Grant Charlton turned pale and haggard at what he saw.

Streaming from the great hothouse came a number of fantastic shapes, and perched on the "shoulders" of the second, third and fourth were three evil-looking

men! It was evident to Dr. Charlton, in that first glance, that the three men were directing and guiding the "army."

And what an army! Living weeds, each one of them towering twelve to fifteen feet into the air—horrible growths, bearing the shape of human beings, with long waving arms and bulbous heads, in which glowed bleary, glassy looking eyes!

"Run, boys—run!" panted Dr. Charlton.

"But, Dad! What—what are they?" asked Hugh.

"The weeds—the weeds!" replied his father, hoarsely. "They have come to life. It is just as Yikk told me—only I was fool enough to disbelieve his story. Run, boys, run!"

Even then, it was too late! The Weed Men were marching upon them, and they came with incredible speed, slithering, sliding, swaying, and rocking. The sight, in the twilight, was terrifying beyond words.

In a moment, Dr. Charlton and his sons were overtaken; they were seized by the tentacle-like arms of the monsters. With an incredibly powerful swing they were flung high into the air.

Mercifully, they all tumbled into a great tangle of bushes, and they came off with scratches and bruises. The two boys, finding their feet in a flower-bed lost, sight of their father. And they could only stare towards the house.

(Continued on page 26.)

them a dose of their own medicine!" Duncan ordered, bawling to make himself heard. "Then get up the anchor—full speed ahead before the storm passes!"

Cleopatra seemed to rise to the waves much better when the anchor was up and the engines at full speed. Slowly at first, she fought her way seawards.

Thunder shook the atmosphere: forked lightning cut and slashed from the inky heavens. The sea was an inferno that buffeted *Cleopatra* as though she were a cork. Of the submarine there was now neither sight nor sound.

Toward evening the storm subsided. Leaving the bridge in charge of the Second Officer, Captain Duncan went below for a spell, taking the elder Rostern with him for a council of war.

"I'm turning the ship right round immediately darkness falls," he said, when the door was closed and locked.

"But—but the submarine?" Rostern's voice betrayed alarm as well as bewilderment.

"If the submarine is still where we left her—as I hope—her people will naturally be surprised to see us." There was a twinkle in Captain Duncan's eye. "We've got a Hondurian flag in the Store Locker, I hope?"

"Good Lord!" Rostern said, as an inkling of the scheme dawned upon him.

"Through their glasses, the submarine officers will see me standing on the Bridge in Admiral

had suddenly rippled the sea's surface. She broke water along her entire gigantic length a moment later, and lay there glistening in the sun. The hatchway of the conning tower opened.

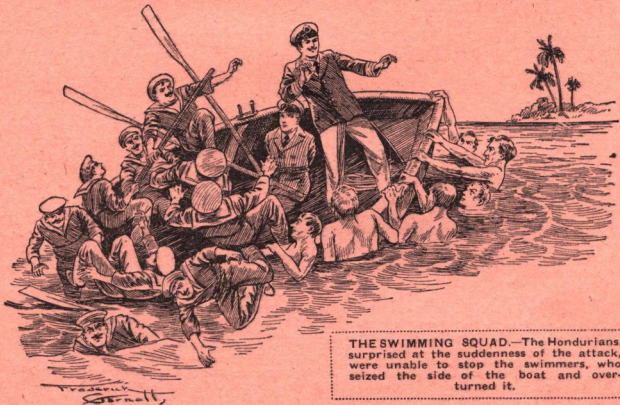
Upon *Cleopatra's* bridge, Captain Duncan stood erect in all the glory of the Hondurian Admiral's gorgeous uniform. His chest and stomach protruded unnaturally by means of two effectively placed cushions. A string of flags hung from *Cleopatra's* masts, men in Hondurian naval uniforms moved smartly about the deck.

"They're coming!" Rostern's voice was a hoarse whisper of excitement. A boat of the collapsible type was being lowered gently to the smooth water.

A cheer, instantly stifled, rose unbidden to the throat of Captain Duncan as he saw the familiar figure of Bob Rostern assisted over the side.

The submarine's boat pushed off and moved towards *Cleopatra* with steady, even strokes. "Pass the word for the men to be ready," Duncan warned, and cast his eye to where half a dozen of his crew crouched, hidden from the sight of the submarine. These men were all picked swimmers, with weapons between their teeth, ready to plunge overboard and tackle the submarine's boat at the first sign of hesitation.

Nearer came the submarine's boat. Duncan could see the surprise and the dawning hope upon Bob Rostern's face. Only one hundred yards separated



THE SWIMMING SQUAD.—The Hondurians, surprised at the suddenness of the attack, were unable to stop the swimmers, who seized the side of the boat and overturned it.

Vertigo's outfit—and ten to one they'll jump to the conclusion that the Admiral has captured the ship," Duncan continued. "And then we'll signal for the prisoner—Bob—to be sent aboard under escort! They'll be surprised—but there's quite a good chance that they'll obey!"

The Battle at Sea.

DAWN heralded a perfect day. The coastline showed up like a distant haze, rapidly growing clearer.

A yell from the look-out man heralded action. A mile away, the periscope of the big submarine

Bob from his friends, when, suddenly, a hoarse shout went up from one of the oarsmen. A hand clutched the arm of the officer in command of the boat. Excited Hondurian voices carried across the waters.

"Up and at 'em!" Duncan ordered, tersely, and the swimmers leaped over the side instantly. Simultaneously, *Cleopatra's* engines woke to life.

Surprised, and thrown into temporary confusion, the Hondurians were wallowing dangerously, the oarsmen at sixes and sevens, when the swimmers reached them. The attackers seized the boat upon its starboard side—and overturned it with ease. In a few seconds, the Hondurians were swimming for life, weighed down with heavy uniforms, weapons

abandoned. One of the swimmers grabbed Bob Rostern's armpits and struck out strongly in the direction of *Cleopatra*.

It was all over in less than ten minutes. Bob was dragged aboard *Cleopatra*—the swimmers, amidst the frenzied cheering of their colleagues were also hoisted to the deck. Then the vessel ran for her life—and not before time. Slow as the submarine's crew might be, they were in action at last. A shell screamed over *Cleopatra's* funnels and plunged into the sea thirty yards away.

The succeeding minutes were hectic. The man at the wheel, obeying Duncan's orders implicitly, threw the ship first this way, then that way. Shells screamed overhead and pitched all around. But the vessel did not succeed in increasing her distance from the pursuing submarine by so much as a yard.

The shells were coming closer now—the submarine's gunnery officer was getting the measure of *Cleopatra's* tactics. A seven-pounder hit the chameleon ship just above the water-line, holing her badly. A second of equal calibre carried away the funnels.

"Torpedo astern," the look-out yelled, suddenly, and as *Cleopatra* swung viciously upon a fresh course, the great tin death-fish tore past, not two yards away. Then a third shell went home—below the water-line this time, so that instantly all available hands had to be rushed to the pumps.

Abruptly, Duncan took charge of the wheel. "Our last throw," he commented, as Rostern looked at him inquiringly. He rang down to the engine-room for three-quarter speed, and held a fixed course, until the gap between *Cleopatra* and the submarine had lessened considerably. Then he called urgently for full speed, and hurled *Cleopatra's* nose straight at the glistening steel back of the underso monster.

"We'll ram her," he gritted and held his breath as the boat responding nobly, leaped forward to vengeance.

Duncan had gauged the courage of the Hondurian officers excellently. Before the menace of *Cleopatra's* sharp bows, they lost their nerve and screamed out orders to submerge.

Duncan took *Cleopatra* straight out to sea, the pumps clanging and wheezing under the desperate efforts of those who strove to keep back the rushing waters.

The submarine reappeared—but she was quite two miles distant. Her guns spoke afresh, but now the shells were well wide.

The Surprise Attack.

TO lighten the ship and help keep her afloat, most of the cargo had to be jettisoned. The feelings of Duncan and Bob Rostern as they saw their miscellaneous stores and supplies dropped overboard, were murderous. Without these stores they had no means of disguising the ship—no means of repairing her—no means of supporting her.

"There's only one possible chance for us," Duncan said, when the ship was riding a little easier. "We must go back to the hiding place we've just left—and human nature being what it is, that will be the last place anyone will think of looking for us. I'm going to give orders to the navigating officer to turn back once darkness falls. And then, I'm going to interview Admiral Vertigo."

Neither of the Rostern brothers accompanied Duncan on his visit to the Admiral. Duncan's methods of drawing information were effective, but far from nice.

"Found out anything," Bob inquired as the Captain returned.

"A good deal," Duncan said, and wiped his hands. "The submarine was headed for our bay of refuge long before your plane was seen, Bob. Admiral Vertigo has a cache of money and valuables hidden near the bay only a mile or two inland—hidden in a place known only to himself and two of his chief officers. Popularity and position, in Honduras, are usually of short and uncertain duration—hence the idea of having one's—or—savings hidden away."

"Good Lord," Bob Duncan said, startled. "So that was it!"

In the hour preceding dawn, *Cleopatra* limped back into the Bay. With engines silent, she drifted towards the shore for the last half-mile. Then, suddenly, Bob Rostern clutched Captain Duncan's shoulder. "She's there," he hissed. "Close inshore."

"I saw her two minutes back, laddie," Duncan said, and altered the ship's course slightly. "Not much of a look-out aboard her or they'd have spotted us long ago."

Dripping clouds obscured the moon. Steadily, *Cleopatra* moved to the sheltered-side of the bay, dropping anchor very quietly when she lay in the shadow of an overhanging cliff. "An hour to dawn," Duncan whispered to Bob. "We're going aboard that submarine, Bob."

Tense, breathless silence hung over the ship as weapons were handed out to the assembled crew. Only three men were left behind—all of them wounded in the previous day's fighting.

"Everything in silence. First the look-out men—if we can get them without noise, then we'll take the rest of the ship section by section," Duncan decided. He turned to Bob. "Try to find the control room, Bob, and hold it for us if you can," he directed.

The moon had dipped for the last time: the night was pitilessly black. With weapons between their teeth, *Cleopatra's* men swam steadily to where the great steel fish lay glistening. They climbed aboard.

Five minutes passed. To Bob Rostern they seemed an age as he explored the ship expecting a challenge every second. Then, quite suddenly the silence was finally shattered by a thin, high-pitched yell of fear from below. Swiftly, pandemonium broke loose.

"Keep together, men. Don't scatter," Duncan's powerful voice was the rallying signal for *Cleopatra's* crew. Foot by foot, they fought their way from stem to stern of the underwater boat.

From the shore, fresh shouts came. There were shots, too, increasing to a regular volley. Swiftly, Duncan summed up the situation. The surprisingly weak resistance aboard the submarine was obviously that of a skeleton crew—the main crew had landed, probably in search of Vertigo's treasure.

A last rush—and the defenders were overwhelmed. They went down, to be seized and trussed—those of them who remained conscious—by *Cleopatra's* sailors. Then, swiftly, Duncan led the way back to the deck—just in time to meet a horde of swimmers from the shore. As the Hondurians tried to climb the steel sides, they were hurled back into the water.

Bob Rostern, alone in the control-room, was working desperately to get the submarine to move. "Anything moving, Bob?" Duncan's face framed the doorway of the control-room.

"Yes. Us," Bob said, quietly, and almost as he spoke the submarine began to glide, quietly, slowly, seaward.

(Continued on page 12.)