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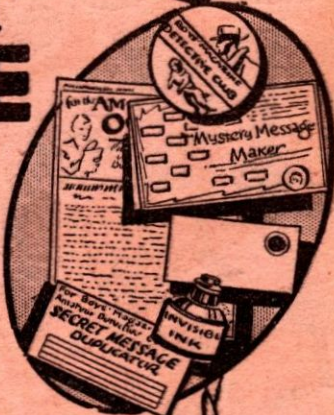
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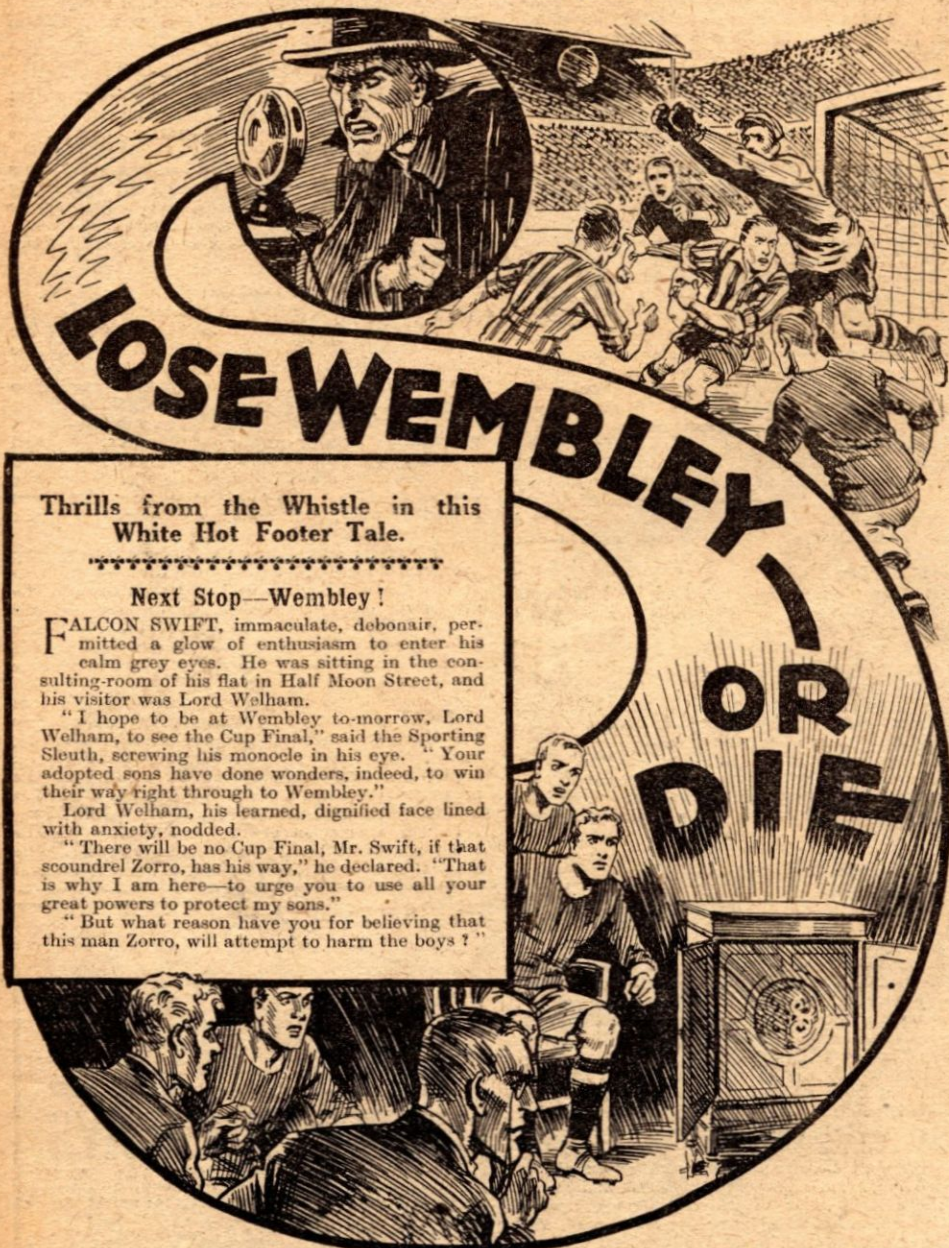
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Thrills from the Whistle in this
White Hot Footer Tale.

Next Stop—Wembley!

FALCON SWIFT, immaculate, debonair, permitted a glow of enthusiasm to enter his calm grey eyes. He was sitting in the consulting-room of his flat in Half Moon Street, and his visitor was Lord Welham.

"I hope to be at Wembley to-morrow, Lord Welham, to see the Cup Final," said the Sporting Sleuth, screwing his monocle in his eye. "Your adopted sons have done wonders, indeed, to win their way right through to Wembley."

Lord Welham, his learned, dignified face lined with anxiety, nodded.

"There will be no Cup Final, Mr. Swift, if that scoundrel Zorro, has his way," he declared. "That is why I am here—to urge you to use all your great powers to protect my sons."

"But what reason have you for believing that this man Zorro, will attempt to harm the boys?"

asked Falcon Swift. "How do you expect him to act?"

"I don't know," said the other helplessly. "Professor Mortimer Zorro—a brilliantly clever archaeologist and scientist—has been my enemy for years. He discovered the great meteorite which is situated at a place on my estate, known as The Crater. This is, in fact, the football enclosure of the boys."

"Yes, I understand all that," replied Swift.

"In a great cavern below the Crater," Lord Welham went on, bending forward, "I discovered some wonderful new metals—worth countless millions, Mr. Swift. Professor Zorro knows this, and he has been attempting to force me to sell. He has tried every murderous dodge to drive my adopted sons from their enclosure. Only the pluck and resource of my boys has kept Zorro at bay. But to-morrow is the Cup Final, and some instinct tells me that Zorro will act."

"What steps have you taken to guard the boys?"

"I thought it advisable to install them in the Majestic Hotel, in the busiest part of the town," replied the scientist peer. "They have finished their training and are resting until this evening when they will come to London in a small luxury motor-coach. You see, the Welham townspeople are very proud of the boys, and they want to give them a rousing send-off. Quite a ceremonious procession has been arranged. I shall travel up to town with the team, and the plan is for us to drive straight to the Grand Babylon Hotel, where we will be received by some of London's most famous sportsmen."

"Quite an excellent programme," commented Falcon Swift, thoughtfully polishing his monocle. "When does the motor-coach start from Welham Town?"

"At seven o'clock sharp," replied Lord Welham. "Will you undertake this commission, Mr. Swift? Will you travel up to London with my boys?"

"I shall not go in the coach—but I shall be there," was Falcon Swift's cryptic reply. And with this Lord Welham had to be satisfied.

"Much ado about nothing, eh, Boss?" asked Chick Conway, when Biddy Malone, Falcon Swift's landlady, had shown the visitor out.

"I fancy not," said the Monocled Manhunter, and his austere, scholarly face became grave. "I know something of Professor Zorro—and it is all bad. There's work ahead of us, laddie—grim, dangerous work."

* * * * *

"GOOD luck, the Miracle boys!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bring the Cup back with you!"

It was nearly seven o'clock, and Lord Welham and his Orphans were about to start on their trip to London. A small open motor-coach was standing outside the hotel, and a dozen policemen were keeping the way clear. Photographers, newspaper-reporters, news-reel cameramen, were standing about with their instruments.

The "Tin-Can Trojans" were grouped on the hotel steps, just outside the doorway, with Lord Welham himself. In front stood the mighty Ajax, brawny, eagle-eyed, smiling—Ajax, the skipper, trainer, and manager. Beside him stood Argus, the lightning-flash centre-forward, and Eos, the wonder goalie. Crowding behind were all the others—Perseus, Hesperus, Nike, outside-left; Dike, outside-right; Boreas and Eurus, the backs—they were all there. Strange names, indeed, for healthy, sturdy British youngsters! But they were all orphans; Lord Welham had adopted them as babies, and he had named them, eccentrically enough, after the gods of Ancient Greek mythology. And they were, indeed, young gods of the football field. They had performed miracles—had fought

their way through the qualifying rounds to the Final of the English Cup Competition.

The forthcoming Cup-tie bade well to be a battle of giants. The Trojans were up against Camchester City—the famous Lancashire team—who boasted many brilliant international players. But the boys were in tip-top condition, and they were full of confidence.

"Hurrah!"

"Keep it up to the end, boys!"

On the other side of the Square a great rocket suddenly hissed skywards, leaving a trail of fire behind it, to burst into the famous colours of the Welham Wanderers.

The colours faded, and five brilliant green stars remained, floating high in the evening air. Everybody in that great multitude believed that the firing of the rocket had been a mere exhibition of exuberance.

But it was a grim signal—for Professor Mortimer Zorro!

"AH!" exclaimed Professor Zorro exultantly.

He was standing on the rocky edge of the Crater—the strange, wild headquarters of the "Miracle Boys." Now it was deserted—save for the sinister, vulture-like form of Zorro.

"The signal!" he exclaimed, a flush coming to his gaunt face. "My friends, we must hurry."

Only for a second longer did he gaze at the distant green stars, floating in the evening sky. He had moved away from the Crater edge, and had joined two other men, dressed in drab overalls. They were Zorro's Grey Men who on other occasions had been garbed in weird grey costumes, like ghouls of the night.

A motor-car was standing near, its engine ticking over, and Zorro leapt into it. Within a few minutes he and his men had arrived at Gaunt Grange, the mysterious old house which was Professor Zorro's home. He sprang out of the car and, followed by his men, he proceeded round the house to the grounds at the back. At last, in a deep hollow, they came upon an extraordinary machine.

It was hidden by the high trees which rose majestically on all sides; a strange machine of grey metal, from which projected queer-looking controlling vanes. Above was a metal body with a cabin—and a platform outside the cabin. In addition to the propellers there were great helicopter vanes, that could lift the machine at an incredible speed.

It was a creation of Professor Zorro—yet he could not claim it for his own. For without the magical powers of Meteoradium, a wonderful metal



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from Lord Welham's meteor, Zorro could not have built the machine.

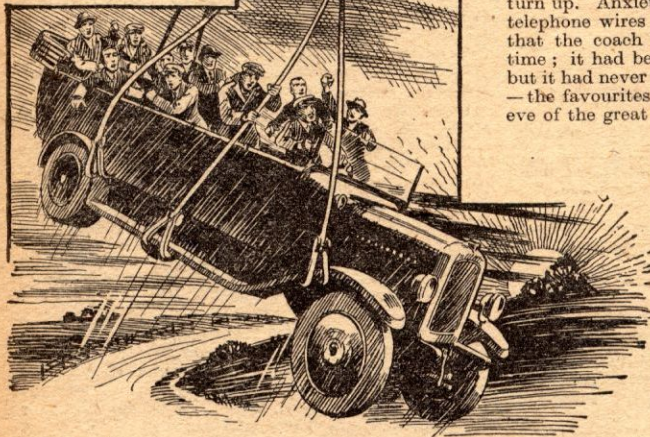
He and his men were soon aboard, and Zorro himself stood at the controls. As swiftly as an eagle the weird aircraft rose straight into the air, her helicopters making only the slightest hum. So, cunningly was she coloured, that at a height of two thousand feet she merged with the grey night sky, and became invisible.

She sped forward now, moving at ever-increasing speed. The evening was drawing on, and the shadows were deepening; far below lay the picturesque countryside of Derbyshire, hilly, wooded, beautiful. The main road to London was easily distinguishable from any of the other roads. And apparently moving at crawling speed, was an open motor-coach decorated with green and orange ribbons. It was the coach containing the Miracle Boys.

Lord Welham was easier in mind since he had interviewed Falcon Swift; yet he was worried because the great criminologist had made no apparent move. No word had come from the Sporting Sleuth, and there had been no sign of him or Chick Conway in Welham Town.

"We must win, brothers—we've just got to take that old Cup back to Welham Town," said Ajax, his eyes glowing.

"Rather!" said Eos happily. "We'll do the



KIDNAPPED IN THE COACH.—Gasps of horror arose from the Miracle Boys as a strange flying machine swooped out of the darkness. Great feelers clamped on the sides of the coach, and next moment it was lifted into the air.

trick. That Cup's as good as ours!"

"Better not be too sure," put in Argus warningly. "Over-confidence has lost more games than unskilled play!"

"He's right, my sons," said Ajax. "We mustn't forget that we're up against the hottest proposition—Hullo! What the dickens—?"

He broke off with a gasp of amazement. From the sky apparently had come great metal "feelers," not unlike claws, which automatically clamped themselves securely to the sides of the coach. Swiftly and silently Zorro had swooped in his super flying machine. Too well had he chosen his time to strike, for the coach had reached an empty, desolate stretch of road. The Miracle Boys gazed up at this mechanical marvel in amazement which swiftly turned to consternation as the aircraft zoomed rapidly into the air, taking the coach and the Trojans with it.

Up—up! At a dizzy speed the air-vessel ascended, which the driver of the coach, terrified by this sudden and unexpected shock, clung helplessly to his driving wheel.

"Zorro!" muttered Lord Welham, in startled, amazed tones, gazing at the Mystery Flyer above. "This is his fiendish work."

On the road below two cars were speeding northwards. They knew nothing of what had happened. That coach had vanished as though it had evaporated into thin air. There had been no witnesses—except Falcon Swift and Chick Conway!

Far, far above, the Monocled Manhunter had followed the coach ever since it had left Welham; he had caught a glimpse of the mysterious aircraft which had suddenly appeared as though from nowhere, had witnessed the astonishing seizure of the motor-coach. And as he sped in pursuit he knew that he was up against something unique.

In London, at the great Grand Babylon Hotel, celebrated sportsmen waited and waited—in vain. For Lord Welham and his Wonder Boys failed to turn up. Anxiety turned to consternation, when the telephone wires had been busy. For it was learned that the coach had left Welham at the appointed time; it had been seen passing through one town—but it had never reached the next! The Miracle Boys—the favourites for Wembley—had vanished on the eve of the great Cup Final!

Zorro's Terms.

ALOW, rocky islet, just off the rugged, desolate North Sea coast, was visible in the gloom—from above—only by the ring of white surf which broke upon its craggy shores. It was a mere rock, treeless, uninhabited save for the swarms of sea birds.

The moon was peeping from behind a heavy cloudbank as the Mystery Flyer dropped gently to the ground. At last the wheels of the motor-coach touched with scarcely a bump. On the instant, Zorro released the steel grips, and the aircraft moved aside for some distance, before settling on the rocks. Meanwhile, the coach driver had jammed his brakes on, for

the vehicle had come to rest on a steep slope and started to roll slowly over the rocks.

"We're down—we've landed somewhere!" yelled Perseus excitedly. "Come on, you chaps!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Lord Welham. "Be careful, boys, I beg of you! That scoundrel, Zorro, is behind this—"

"You are uncomplimentary, as usual, Lord Welham," interrupted a mocking voice. "Get out—all of you! And let me advise you to attempt no violence, for my men and myself are armed, and we shall not hesitate to shoot."

The Miracle Boys crowded out of the coach, bewildered, angry. They found themselves on a bleak rock, scarcely a quarter-of-a-mile long, and borne on the strong sea breeze the thunder of the surf came clearly.

"You—you scoundrel!" exclaimed Lord Welham, his voice throbbing. "What is the meaning of this? Why have you brought us to this barren spot?"

"I will tell you—and in a very few words," replied Professor Zorro, purringly. "In the first place, it was essential that we should have absolute privacy. Furthermore, I wanted to make sure that I seized the entire Wembley team. Remember, Lord Welham, that you are all many miles from land; that nobody ashore can possibly guess what has become of you. Therefore, there will be no search in this direction."

"Bluntly, we are in your power," said Lord Welham grimly.

"Exactly said the Professor, bending forward, his vulture-like figure looking hideous in the gloom,

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"And, Lord Welham, the price of your liberty is merely your signature."

"Signature!" repeated Lord Welham. "Signature to what?"

"To this document," said Zorro, taking a folded paper from his pocket. "It is legally drawn up and will transfer to me the entire rights of a certain strip of your property—a little corner of the Welham Park estate."

"Don't sign, Chief!" urged Ajax furiously. "We know what his game is, the crook! He wants to grab the Crater—our football enclosure!"

"I am not interested in your petty football," sneered Professor Zorro.

"No; you want the great meteorite which lies buried beneath the Crater," said Lord Welham angrily. "It is worth millions—"

"And well I know it," interrupted Zorro. "I cannot claim it as my own until the property is mine. Therefore, Lord Welham, you will sign. Should you refuse, you will send these boys to their deaths. In an hour's time it will be high tide and this rock will be completely covered to a depth of some feet. I fancy, Welham, that you will be

reluctant to see your boys suffering the tortures of a slow death. And if you are still obstinate—well, the world will never see Lord Welham's Orphans again."

There was a terrible, sinister malevolence in Zorro's soft, purring voice. Lord Welham shuddered involuntarily. His face was haggard and drawn. For the sake of his boys he would give in. With a sudden impulsive movement, he took out his fountain pen and uncapped it.

"Listen!" exclaimed Ajax breathlessly.

His acute ears had caught a faint, distant sound—audible only during lulls in the thunder of the breakers on the rocky shore. Ajax, staring upwards, suddenly pointed.

"Look—a 'plane!" he cried.

"Master, he is right!" panted one of the Grey Men. "It is circling. We are watched!"

"Courage, boys!" exclaimed Lord Welham, exultantly. "Falcon Swift has not failed us!"

"Falcon Swift!" gasped Zorro, recoiling, his face distorted with hatred.

Lord Welham regretted his words; but in the excitement of the moment he had blundered gratuitously, he had informed Zorro of Falcon Swift's interest in the case. There was only one thing Zorro could do; he spun round on his Grey Men, and gave them sharp, curt orders. A minute later, the Mystery Flyer shot skywards—to give battle to Falcon Swift's 'plane, and to destroy it.

Marooned.

"BOSS!" exclaimed Chick Conway excitedly. "Look! That rummy aircraft is zooming up at us at terrific speed!"

The Sporting 'Tec had already seen, and he was looking grim and tense.

"It means a fight to the death, laddie!" he replied. "We have seen some of the powers of that craft. Our only chance is to keep above, and that will mean some tricky flying."

Silently, with deadly swiftness, the Mystery Flyer had risen to the same level as Falcon Swift's sturdy 'plane. Both the Monocled Manhunter and Chick were seated in open cockpits—for this machine was a racer, incorporating some surprising features of its own.

Down below, on the surface of that crag, the marooned footballers watched with fascinated interest. The moon had come out strongly now, and in its pale, silvery light Falcon Swift's machine flashed brightly. The Mystery Flyer was like a mere shadow, a ghostly will-o'-the-wisp.

The two aircraft were on the same level now; the Mystery Flyer rose higher and higher, silent and deadly. Then, with dramatic suddenness, it swooped. Down—down. . . .

But Falcon Swift was ready. Up went the nose of his 'plane, and the craft shot skywards vertically, executing a perfect loop. By the time the machine had flattened out, the Mystery Flyer was a quarter-of-a-mile away, and manœuvring for another onslaught. Without giving his enemy time to get into a favourable position, Falcon Swift swooped like a vulture.

Crack-crack-crack! Crack-crack-crack! Above the drone of the speed 'plane came an ominous, staccato chatter. The Miracle Boys saw livid flashes of fire spurting from the speed 'plane's nose.

"A machine-gun!" yelled Argus. "Hurrah! Mr. Swift is putting up a grand fight!"

"Curse him!" snarled Zorro, beside himself with anxiety.

It was a shock for him to know that the Monocled Manhunter was so armed. Realisation of their peril rattled the men in the Mystery Flyer. In something of a panic, they glided down towards the islet. And

Falcon Swift seized his chance. He sent his 'plane down in a zooming dive, straight at the Mystery Flyer. And as he dived, his machine-gur burst into deadly, stuttering song, hurling a rain of bullets into the vitals of the enemy craft. At the last second the Monocled Manhunter yanked open the edge slots and the 'plane zoomed up.

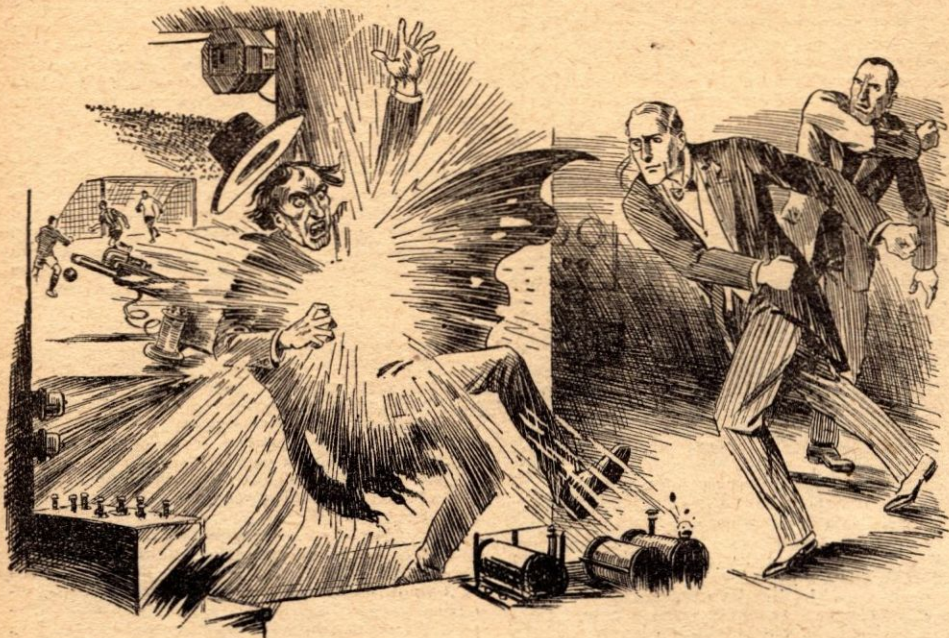
The enemy machine hovered for an instant, lurched, and then fell like a stone. Down it went, completely out of control, gaining speed with every foot. . . .

Splaaaaaaash!—craaaaaash! The machine crashed into the sea, close to the islet, sending up

The Trojans were bitterly disappointed. They had expected help from Falcon Swift. True, he had wrecked Zorro's wonder machine, but the boys' plight was as desperate as before. Worse, in fact, for the rock was already swept by the bigger waves. Unless help arrived in a very short time, they were doomed. The water was rising at an incredible speed.

"So," gloated Zorro. "Mr. Swift is clever, but not clever enough to save you and your brats, Welham. In half-an-hour you will be dead and I will be able to work at the meteorite undisturbed."

Pefore Lord Welham or his boys had realised the



NEMESIS!—Zorro hurtled backwards, struck against his ray machine and toppled over. There was a vivid flash, flames enveloped the crook, and rays of light radiated from his body.

huge fountains of water. When the turmoil subsided, little bits of wreckage were seen floating on the surface. Of Zorro's men, however, there was no sign.

"An ugly business, Chick!" said Falcon Swift grimly, as he stared over the cockpit. "But it was our lives or theirs."

"What's the next move, Boss?" asked Chick breathlessly.

"We must get help—at once," replied Falcon Swift. "Zorro will be mad with rage and will seek some drastic means of revenging himself. I don't like leaving them, Chick, but we must find help to get them back to safety."

Falcon Swift circled above the rock, and saw that it was now not so high out of the water. And he realised that if Lord Welham and his boys were left there it would be touch-and-go whether he could get back with help to save them from a cruel fate. He opened out the throttle and zoomed away into the night sky.

Professor Zorro, seeing the 'plane fly off, gloated malevolently. He still had time to carry out his diabolical plan, thereby wiping out all evidence of his villainy and revenging himself on Lord Welham and his boys.

significance of Zorro's words, he turned and darted away, splashing through the pools of water that covered the island. Suddenly he disappeared behind a pinnacle of rock, and next moment there came the purring of a motor-engine. Even as the Miracle Boys dashed forward a small motor-boat shot away from the islet and as it disappeared in the darkness Zorro's mocking laughter floated back to the marooned footballers.

Gradually the sound of the motor boat engine died away and the Miracle Boys were alone, awaiting their doom.

The islet was completely awash now, except for small projecting pieces of rock. The sea swirled and eddied round the boys' ankles. The rocks had become slippery, and it was as much as they could do to keep their feet.

"Have courage, boys," exclaimed Lord Welham. "We are not beaten yet. I do not think Mr. Swift has really deserted us. He has probably gone to fetch help. We must wait and hope."

Trying manfully to keep the fear and dread out of their voices, the boys chatted together, while the water slowly rose, higher . . . higher. . . .

Despite their efforts, the minutes seemed like eternity, so slowly did the time pass; yet the water was creeping almost perceptibly up their limbs. It was bitterly cold. Their feet and legs were numb. Their bodies were almost chilled to the bone. Still the sea crept up, to their knees, their thighs . . . higher . . . higher. . .

Suddenly, Themis toppled over sideways with a shrill scream of terror and disappeared below the surface. The surge of the water had knocked him off his feet. He rose to the surface, struggling wildly, his eyes filled with a great fear. And as he was about to sink again Ajax plunged forward, seized him by the coat-collar and hauled him to his feet again.

After that, Lord Welham and his boys bunched closer together, fearful lest one of them should be carried away. Higher still the water rose, till it seemed that nothing could save them. Soon they would have to swim for it. They might keep afloat for an hour or two, but then they must inevitably sink—grinned in the chill hand of death. Even the great Falcon Swift had apparently failed them.

"Listen! Can you hear it?" exclaimed Argus suddenly. "It's an engine!"

Above the swish and lap of the waves a faint, distant hum could be heard. Was it merely a passing plane that would almost certainly fail to see them? Or was it help at last?

Louder and louder grew the sound, and the boys could distinguish a minute speck in the distance which grew rapidly larger every moment. Hope welled afresh in their hearts, and the Trojans yelled madly, waving their arms frantically in a desperate endeavour to attract the pilot's attention.

Almost delirious with joy and thankfulness, they saw the plane—a big, cabined passenger-carrying flying-boat—shape towards the rock and at last it circled low over them, finally coming to rest on the sea a short distance from the rock. The door of the cabin opened and Falcon Swift appeared, with Chick Conway close behind.

"Hold on!" shouted the Sporting Sleuth. "I'm going to throw you a line."

Next moment, he whirled a great coil of rope above his head and let fly. An expert with the lasso, Falcon Swift's first cast fell within Ajax's reach, and with a shout the mighty skipper seized hold of it. While he held on to the end, each of the boys and Lord Welham hauled himself to safety.

At last, Ajax himself had been taken on board the plane, where towels and great blankets were waiting for them.

"You have done wonders, Mr. Swift!" said Lord Welham gratefully. "I shall never be able to thank you—"

"Don't try," broke in the imperturbable sleuth. "We must get you to the Grand Babylon Hotel at once, before any of you get pneumonia."

And the famous criminologist went to the controls and the plane once more rose into the air. On the way back, Chick Conway told the Miracle Boys of Falcon Swift's thrilling dash to Croydon Aerodrome, where he had chartered the huge, cabined plane and had crammed on all speed back to the rock, arriving in the nick of time.

The Battle Of Footer Giants.

WEMBLEY! The super stadium was packed to suffocation. In a sedate, orderly fashion, the multitudes of football enthusiasts had filed through the many entrances; the great stands had filled; the terraces were packed.

Distinguished people were on the gloriously green turf, with photographers and newspaper men. Amid tumultuous cheering the teams had come out.

Camchester City, that lordly First Division team—and Welham Wanderers, mere schoolboys, amateurs, lowly seekers for honours!

It was a wonderful afternoon; fleecy white clouds were dotting the blue sky. Aeroplanes were continually passing overhead. Falcon Swift and Chick Conway were in that multitude; and the great criminologist was wondering how Zorro would strike at the Miracle Boys.

Falcon Swift was on the alert, watching grimly. For he had had a long talk with Lord Welham, who now stood beside him and knew a great deal of Zorro's inventions. The Monocled Manhunter, through his binoculars, had taken careful stock of the men who stood round the field, pressmen and photographers who had been granted special privileges. And Falcon Swift was confident that Zorro was not amongst those men. Yet he was convinced that the crook archæologist was determined to act.

* * * * *

EARLIER, Professor Zorro had acted.

With unusual daring, he had decided upon a particularly drastic course of action. He and two of his crook assistants had boldly presented themselves as official wireless technicians, and Zorro's cleverly faked credentials had scarcely been examined. They had come ostensibly to make some last-minute adjustments in the wireless control room, overlooking the ground, from which the running commentary on the game would be made.

The commentator and his assistant were already in charge, and everything was working perfectly. They were surprised to see the supposed technicians, but suspected nothing as Zorro and his men made a pretence of examining the apparatus. The unfortunate men were taken completely off their guard; for, suddenly, Zorro switched on a meteoradium ray. The victims crumpled as they stood, falling without a sound.

Almost in the same second one of Zorro's assistants carried on with the commentary at the microphone. During those brief minutes while Zorro had been examining the mechanism, his men had made themselves familiar with the voices of the real commentators. The man who now carried on did so with such exactitude that the listening public suspected nothing.

Meanwhile, Zorro rapidly unpacked the heavy suitcases which he and his assistants had brought, and while the running commentary continued, Zorro connected his own deadly apparatus with the broadcasting mechanism. At a touch from a switch, he could now flood the playing field with an invisible current—the deadly meteoradium ray. It was one of the marvels which Zorro had found in the meteorite. He had controlled it, and his hour of revenge was at hand.

* * * * *

THEY'RE off!"

"Hurrah!"

Loud cheers went up as the great game started. Lord Welham, standing by Falcon Swift's side, uttered a sigh of relief.

"Zorro was just boasting, then," he muttered. "The boys are safe now. They are on the field—and Zorro cannot get at them."

But Falcon Swift was not paying any attention to the peer. He was staring fascinatedly at the field for Swift, at heart, was a sportsman. He marvelled. Was it a boy, or a magician, which flashed across the perfect turf? It was Argus, the Trojan's wonder centre-forward; his slim figure, in orange and green, outpaced a racing defender. A neat side-step, a tap at the ball and he had left the half-back floundering. With dazzling, wizard-like dribbling he went through

the defence until there was nobody but the Camchester custodian to beat.

Slam! The ball left Argus' foot with the speed of a cannon-ball. It was a foot off the ground and it did not rise at all as it sped for the bottom right-hand corner of the post. Desperately the Camchester goalie hurled himself at it. By a miracle he got his fingers to the hurtling leather, but could not grip it. Then it was shaking the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Argus!"

The excitement was tremendous. In the first three minutes, Lord Welham's "Orphans" were one up. Grimly the two teams lined up again facing each other. The referee's whistle shrilled and they were off again. And now it was a ding-dong struggle, the ball running from one end of the field to the other.

There was something marvellous in the teamwork of Ajax and his men. Like an oiled machine, working on smooth ball-bearings, the Trojans moved to the attack. Whether they moved forward with short, snappy passes or long wing to wing kicks, their precision and accuracy were incredible.

Strangely enough, however, the boys began to

lose his pep, was lethargic, and the ball sizzled through his fingers, into the net.

"Goal!"

All Lancashire seemed to be cheering that goal. One all—and the Miracle Boys looked like a beaten team already.

Little did the spectators know that there was something demoniacally crooked about the whole game! For there, in the wireless room, stood Professor Mortimer Zorro—and that evil machine of his was sending forth its mysterious, deadly current across the pitch.

Zorro had made experiments; he knew that the strange current would not affect the Camchester players, or any of the spectators. It would only harm the Miracle Boys. For, the Trojans being almost daily at the Crater had become impregnated with an unknown Force, which the meteorite exuded.

And upon this Force Zorro's meteoradium ray had a peculiarly deadly effect; gradually it sapped the energy from the boys. They would shrink and shrivel away, almost to nothing. Zorro was killing the boys by slow degrees! He watched them, minute after minute, growing more lethargic, and he gloated inwardly. This was his devilish revenge!



THE WINNING GOAL AT WEMBLEY.—Two minutes from the end Ajax went through on his own. He steadied himself, then shot, a high, stinging cannon-ball drive.

lose pace. This was unusual, for they were celebrated for their stamina. They played hard, they played brilliantly, but they could not again break through the Camchester defence.

Towards half-time, when they were showing more pronounced signs of tiring, Jimmy McWade, the famous pivot of Camchester, set in motion a winning movement. He flung the ball out to the right wing. It was a glorious pass, and the winger was on the ball in a flash, beating Boreas with surprising ease. Boreas seemed lethargic. Away went the winger, hugging the touch-line. Right to the goal line he ran, then centred. The ball raced to the goalmouth to the feet of the centre-forward who sent in a terrific, first-time drive.

It was a tremendous shot but ordinarily Eos would have got to it with ease. But the wonder goalie had

The Winning Goal.

"BOYS, if we never showed determination before, we've got to show it now!"

It was Ajax speaking. He and his fellow players were in the dressing-room, enjoying the half-time interval.

"I can't understand it," said Perseus, wiping his perspiring brow. "Why are we so slow—so tired?"

"Zorro is at the bottom of it—I know it," vowed Ajax. "Don't you remember how he used a horrible ray once, and made parts of us invisible? He's using another ray now—something out of that meteorite."

"But what can we do?" asked Eos helplessly. "We don't even know where this 'fluence' is coming from."

One of the others had switched on the wireless, for they were all keen to hear what the expert commentator had to say about their play. Suddenly, however, another voice cut in, superimposing itself upon that of the commentator.

"Zorro!" gasped Ajax, leaping to the instrument. "Quiet, you fellows! Listen!"

"... sorry to interrupt, but this message is not for the general public and nobody will ever know how I am cutting in, or from where. My message is brief. Unless a certain man signs a certain document at once, eleven people will die. They are already dying!"

"He means us!" muttered Perseus, white-faced. "Hush!" warned Falcon Swift, who had entered the dressing-room with Lord Welham in time to hear the dramatic broadcast.

"They will continue to die—gradually, pitifully," went on Zorro's gloating voice. "They can be saved by a mere signature. If the man I mean is prepared to sign, he must go at once to his parked car and the document will be there. He must go alone, for, if there is any treachery, death will still come to the eleven. If he signs, all will be well."

The voice ceased abruptly. Throughout, the commentator had talked, but Zorro's voice had almost drowned the other's.

"That speech was intended for you, Lord Welham," said Falcon Swift grimly.

"I must go!" panted Lord Welham. "Boys, how terrible! Heaven alone knows what fiendish device Zorro has employed, but you shall suffer no longer. I will surrender to his terms!"

"No, Chief," urged Ajax. "We'll stick it. We'll carry on!"

"Yes, rather!" chorused the others.

"Boys, leave this to me," broke in Falcon Swift, his voice calm and resolute, as he thoughtfully polished his monocle. "Lord Welham shall not surrender. Neither shall you die. Play as you've never played before. Go out with a great determination to win the game, I will do the rest."

When the Trojans went out on the field again, they were looking determined—for Falcon Swift's words had affected them greatly. They battled gamely. Yet, despite their dogged will power, their feet still dragged heavily.

In the meantime, Lord Welham, anxious and troubled, walked swiftly to his big enclosed car in the special car-park.

As Lord Welham opened one of the rear doors, a well-dressed, foxy-faced man appeared from behind the next car, and he was carrying a folded paper.

"It was sensible of you to come, Lord Welham," said the man coolly. "My Chief—"

"I am thinking only of the boys," muttered Lord Welham. "Give me the document!"

With trembling hands he uncapped his fountain pen. He prepared to sign. Suddenly, his hands whipped out and the next second a pair of gleaming handcuffs were snapped over the foxy-faced man's wrists.

"You are my prisoner," said a grim cold voice.

With one movement Lord Welham swept off his hat and grey wig; the lines of his face seemed to vanish—and he stood revealed as Falcon Swift. The great detective had taken a chance.

"Fool!" snarled the prisoner. "This means that the boys will die! Zorro is fully prepared—and you will never get him."

"At least, my friend, I have got you," retorted Falcon Swift.

As he handed the man over to a couple of constables he stood stock still. A rocket was soaring skywards.

It burst. Five red stars! A confederate, then, had been watching from a distance. The Sporting Sleuth's eye glittered behind its monocle.

He was off like the wind. His brilliant brain was working at lightning speed. That signal meant that Professor Zorro was close at hand! He had "cut in" upon the broadcast from somewhere near by.

"By James!" ejaculated Swift, as a thought occurred to him.

What proof was there that Zorro had cut in at all? Was it not far more likely that he had actually spoken into the microphone?

With the speed of a track-racer the Sporting Sleuth raced round the back of the stands and terraces to the wireless room. The door was locked. A curt voice refused him admittance.

The Monocled Manhunter's gun appeared in his hand as though by magic. He stepped back, and with one charge he crashed clean through into the wireless room. In that instant Professor Zorro knew that his game was up unless he acted quickly. Even as Falcon Swift charged, the detective saw the unconscious commentators—and he knew the truth. Before Zorro could whip a deadly instrument from his pocket, the Sporting Sleuth had the Professor in a neat ju-jitsu hold.

"You do not use that thing on me," said the detective curtly.

But Professor Zorro, baffled at the moment of victory, possessed the strength of a giant. With a scream of rage, he tore himself completely free from Falcon Swift's grip. He went hurtling backwards, by the very violence of his own movement. He struck against his deadly machine and he and the instrument went toppling over together.

They struck the floor; there was a vivid, purple flash, so blinding that Swift backed away. For a moment the Professor seemed to be completely surrounded by a halo of light. Brilliant, lightning-like flashes zig-zagged from his body. Abruptly the light vanished and a curious vapour rose from the wrecked instrument. And Zorro was but a shrunken caricature of himself. He was no more.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Falcon Swift, shocked out of his usual calm.

It was Lord Welham, running in at that moment, who guessed the truth.

"He was using some of the meteoradium in that machine!" he panted. "Zorro released all the energy at once by his fall—he received it himself, for its effect is quite local when it is so abruptly discharged. And this is the result!"

And on the field Ajax and his men, still fighting, doggedly felt a subtle, gradual change. Now that Zorro's deadly ray was no longer working their will power was triumphing to a certain extent over their lethargy. They seemed restored partially to their former selves.

Somehow the Miracle Boys had kept Camchester City at bay. The score still stood at one all. And there followed now a grim dour struggle.

Those last few minutes were the most exacting of any Cup Final that had ever taken place at Wembley. It was Ajax the mighty—Ajax the skipper—who, a minute before the end, ran right through on his own, to slam the ball into the net with a terrific, cannon-ball drive and win the coveted Cup for the Tin-Can Trojans. It had been the pluckiest effort of a plucky game, and never did the crowds know of the real fight which the Miracle Boys had had.

Falcon Swift and Chick Conway top the bill in next week's Special Sleuth Number. And Wonder Amateur Detective Outfits FREE. Order your Mag. early and make sure of this Unrivalled FREE Gift.

OUR WHITE-HOT WONDER TALE OF THE SPEEDWAY. The Exploits of
ALEXIS SPEED—SUPER SLEUTH OF THE CINDERS!

The DIRT TRACK DETECTIVE

Thrills Ablaze, and a Gripping Crook Plot, while the Glittering Speed-irons Hurtle Over the Dirt Track and the Cinder Sleuth Fights For a Speed-man's Honour!



Foul Play.

THE din of the crowd mingled with the splutter and bang of the four gleaming speed-bikes as they hurtled over the arc-lit cinders. Excitement was at fever-heat; for the final of the Home Counties Championship was in progress. That was why the Speed-drome was crammed to its utmost capacity to-night; that was why the four, leather-clad riders were putting all they knew into their riding; all their skill—all their daring.

And the checked flag had already dropped for the last circuit—

Rrrrrrrrr! The four riders swept round the first bend in a bunch; twist-gripping their cut-outs madly, steel toes digging in the dirt. Then, with loud bangs, as full cylinders fired to fresh sparks, they jerked into faster motion for the straight. Above them, the blinding arc-lights; below their whizzing wheels, the grey-black blur of cinders; around them, a solid wall of dusk-disguised faces. Then . . . the next bend. . . .

As he went round it, fingering his cut-out and heeling over for the broadside, Micky Wayt felt anxious. Not for himself—he was concerned about his brother Jerry, who was his partner in this final tussle with Worpleton, the other finalists. For Jerry, the frank-faced, smiling daredevil he idolised, had become strangely taciturn of late. Worse—Micky had reason to suspect him of deliberately losing races for the Speed-drome team.

"But he'll not pull this one—not old Jerry!" he told himself. And despite the strain and noise of the struggle, the upflung cinder-spray, he stole a glance

at the crouching figure of his brother, who hurtled along slightly ahead on the inside position. As he did so a gasp of horror escaped his lips. For even at that moment the other was reaching out with a leather riding boot for his—Micky's—front wheel. He tried to pull away—too late. His mount bucked madly, sliding round broadside on; then, missing his offside opponent by inches, the machine shot from under him and crashed into the safety net.

Micky took a whack on the head, as he hit the track, which must have smashed his skull had it not been for his crash-helmet. In a daze he heard the gun crack as the remaining three riders shot over the winning line; heard a section of the crowd shouting their plaudits to the victors—

"Worp—Worp—Worpleton! Worp—Worp—Worpleton! Hurrah! Worpleton wins!"

The young dirt track ace groaned as officials helped him into the paddock. But it was not with physical pain. Anguish, bitterness and dismay filled his heart. His own brother had fouled him—blatantly, deliberately he had put him out of the race; then calmly allowed their rivals to walk off with the event.

His drooping shoulders, as he limped into the paddock, were in direct contrast to the jaunty air of Jerry, who was already there. One hand negligently in the pocket of his riding leathers, the other holding a freshly lit cigarette, Jerry Wayt's manner certainly did not suggest that he had just lost an important race for his team. And at his cool *insouciance* Micky suddenly saw red; something seemed to snap in his brain as he planted himself in front of the other.

"Well—you—dirty cad!" he ground out between set teeth. "Now perhaps you're satisfied."

"Why—er—quite!" mocked Jerry Wayt. "It wasn't *my* fault we lost the race!"

As they stood thus the pair were in startling contrast. Micky, fair-haired, rather stockily built, and at the moment flushed with a burning anger; the other, jet black hair brushed sleekly back, tall and handsome—and ice cool! Yet there was a slight sallowness beneath his skin that compared very unfavourably with Micky's sun-tanned cleanness.

His calm suggestion, that rather was it Micky's fault than his that the Speed-drome had been so miserably eclipsed, robbed the younger rider of his last vestige of self-control.

"Why—you—skunk——" He raised his fist as though to strike the other in the face. But calm as he was, Jerry Wayt was ready. His eyes narrowed to cruel slits, and swift as a striking snake, his bunched knuckles crashed into Micky's solar plexus. In the ring that blow would have been judged quite fair; as Jerry Wayt used it, it was definitely ruthless and cowardly.

In terrible pain, Micky doubled up like a knife; and the man who had hit him strolled calmly away to the dressing-rooms. He went without a backward glance at the writhing youngster who had heretofore worshipped him but a few days ago. An angry hiss followed him from the other riders who had seen that dastardly blow, but his expression of sneering indifference did not change.

The Speedway Sleuth.

ALEXIS SPEED, dirt track sleuth, looked up from the blueprints he had been studying, as a visitor was ushered into his presence. It was Micky Wayt. Despite the emotion under which he laboured, the young dirt track ace cast an approving glance around the well-equipped room. On the walls hung pictures of dirt track bikes, sectional drawings and plans of different types of engines; in various niches stood gleaming models of the same engines—some of Alexis Speed's improvements and inventions.

For Alexis Speed was a millionaire. His chief work was designing motor-bike engines; his hobby, solving the troubles of any dirt track rider who came to him. That was why his name had become famous on every speedway as the Dirt Track Detective; that was why Micky Wayt had come to him now. And Micky was not disappointed in the man himself. The lean face, hawk like eyes, and strong, cleft chin bespoke a brilliant intellect and colossal determination. What Alexis Speed began he always finished, and woe betide the crooks of the Speedways who crossed his path.

Now he held out a muscular hand to Micky and told him to be seated.

"Well, Wayt, I remember you. Saw you ride in the finals at the Speed-drome last autumn. What's your trouble?"

"Fraid it's a long story, Mr. Speed—and a queer one. But there's more behind it than there seems." And he proceeded to tell Alexis Speed of the strange behaviour of his brother during the last three weeks—culminating with the stormy scene in the Speed-drome paddock. He told all this calmly—including his suspicions that Jerry was in the hands of some gambling organisation. Betting, of course, was not permitted on the track—but it went on behind the scenes. When Micky Wayt reached the end of his story, however, his calm dropped from him like a cloak.

"It's no use, Mr. Speed—I won't believe it!" he almost sobbed. "Jerry wouldn't hit me—his own

brother—a foul blow; Jerry wouldn't mess up his career by getting mixed up with bookies; Jerry wouldn't deliberately lose his races——"

"In other words," broke in the Dirt Track Detective quietly, "you believe this man is an impostor—that he isn't your brother at all!"

The young speedman drew a deep breath. "Yes—it seems absurd to think that anyone could look so like Jerry, but I do."

"Oh, there are doubles in the world beyond doubt," Speed assured him. "But if this fellow is an impostor what chances have there been of his being spotted. I mean, does he live at home with you and your mother——"

"No—we're orphans, Jerry and I," answered Micky. "We lodged at the same place until a few days ago—until Jerry started going crooked, in fact. Since then we've lived apart."

"H'm! So you actually saw him only at the speedway? That would make it much easier," murmured the dirt track 'tec. Then, on a sudden decision, he leaned forward. "We've got to make sure of your suspicions before we act, Wayt. And though faces and figures can be disguised, it is said that one thing cannot be altered. *No two men's fingerprints have ever been found to be alike!* Can you get hold of a couple of objects—one that Jerry handled before—er—the change; and one he has handled recently?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Speed," said Micky Wayt, eagerly. "I think I can."

"Then bring them to me as soon as possible."

THE young speedway ace was gone less than an hour. When he returned, he brought two objects carefully wrapped in cotton wool and carried within a leather gladstone bag.

"Ah, you did well to protect them," murmured Alexis Speed as he took off the wrappings and displayed them on the bench. One was an aluminium piston, which Jerry had left lying in the workshop the pair had shared before the split. The other was a flat tobacco tin which the speedman had carelessly thrown into his locker in the dressing-room that afternoon.

"Excellent! Now we shan't be long," said Alexis Speed briskly, and producing a microscope from a drawer examined both articles closely. The piston head had been cleaned and polished ready to be gudgeon-pinned back on to the con-rod—so that its smooth surface was ideal for fingerprints. Speed found it was covered with them! So was the tobacco tin. He now produced a box of black powder and lightly dusted the prints with it. They immediately showed up clearly in every detail so that they were plain even to Micky's prentice eyes. And even Micky realised that they were identical.

"I'm afraid your suspicions were unfounded," said Alexis Speed slowly. "These prints are exactly similar. They are what is known as close-whorl prints. And see, even that slight scar, caused by a rather severe cut on the ball of the thumb, is on both sets of them. I'm sorry, old chap, I——"

He broke off with an exclamation and peered at the prints again through his glass. When he looked up at his companion there was a strange glint in his steely eyes.

"My boy—you were right after all. The man who handled that tobacco box was a different person from the one who made the fingerprints on the piston. See this?" He pointed to a number of coarser ridges below the fingerprints on both the piston and the tobacco box. "Those are what are known as palm prints. Only during the last year or two have fingerprint experts—Scotland Yard included—known that they are as infallible in

detecting the identity of criminals as fingerprints themselves. And these two specimens here are as different as chalk and cheese. Yet the fingerprints to which they belong are the same as each other!"

"Bust my cylinders!" yelled Micky Wayt—becoming his natural slangy self in his relief and excitement. "How are we going to catch this blighter out. And where's Jerry—what's happened to him—"

"Steady—steady!" chided Speed. "If we shadow the man who is pretending to be your brother when he leaves the Speed-drome to-morrow, I think he will lead us to where your brother is being kept prisoner."

The Cylinder of Death.

"LEAVE your bus here and we'll shadow him on foot!" Alexis Speed's whisper mingled with the low burble of the twin exhausts of his big Brough.

He and Micky Wayt had trailed the suspected speedman south from the Speed-drome. Now they stood dismounted on the edge of a thick wood in the heart of Surrey. Their quarry had just swung along a narrow, overgrown path and disappeared into its depths.

"Okay, Mr. Speed!" There was a tense note of excitement in the young dirt-track star's voice as he whispered the reply. Carefully concealing their machines in the bushes, the pair slid silently into the wood.

It was still an hour to sunset, but the thick foliage of the trees shut out the light so that the winding path was enshrouded in an unnatural, eerie gloom.

The dirt-track detective guided by a footprint here, a broken twig there, led the way in the wake of the unsuspecting man. Suddenly the trail led off from the path at right-angles and then ended altogether at a wicket-gate set in a high, brick wall.

"H'm—have to climb it," muttered the sleuth. "You first, Micky." He made a "back" for his companion who was thus able to get a grip on the top of the wall. In another minute they were both standing tense in the overgrown wilderness that had once been a well-kept garden, at the other side of the barrier.

"Soot my spark-plugs!" exclaimed Micky. "I'll be glad to get out of this. I—"

The detective silenced him with a gesture. "Follow me!" he hissed and went off down a weed-covered path, which led to a broad, ill-kept lawn. By skirting this through the trees the pair reached the rear of the big house that lay beyond.

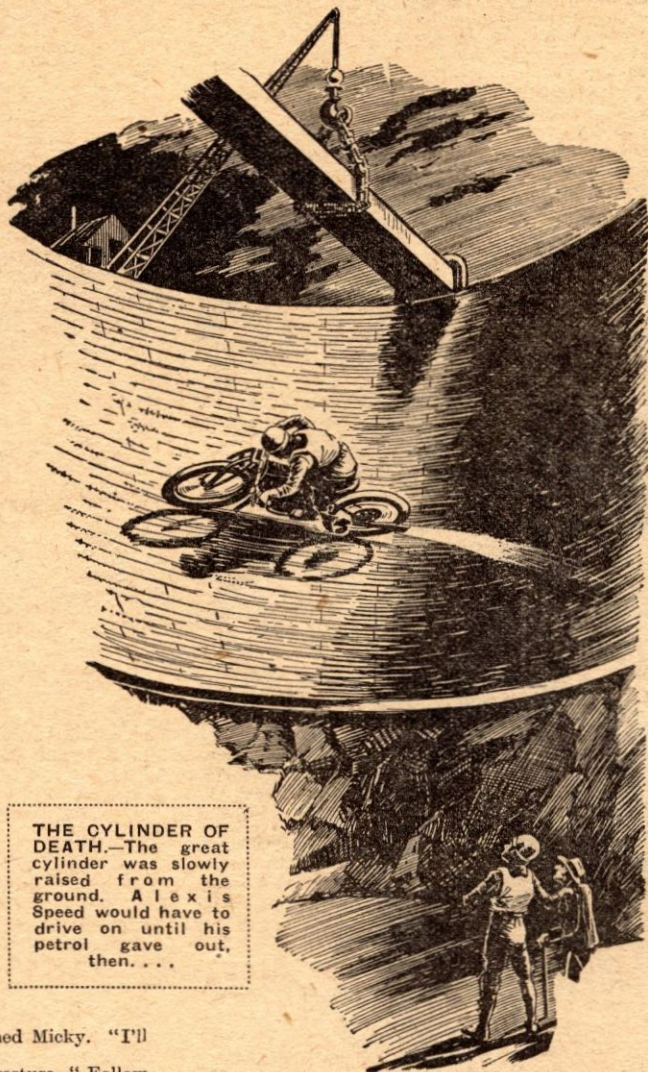
Voices reached them—coming from an open window. The pair crept close.

"I tell you, Boss, it's time for the show-down. That confounded brother of his is beginning to suspect—" The voice was unfamiliar to both listeners; but, taking a cautious peep over the sill, Micky Wayt received a shock. It was the man who

was supposed to be his brother speaking. With him was a short, hunchbacked individual whose face was a mask of evil.

"Sefton Carlos," Alexis Speed muttered in Micky's ear. "Wanted by the police of three continents. I wondered where the old fox had gone to earth!"

But Carlos was now replying to his visitor and the



THE CYLINDER OF DEATH.—The great cylinder was slowly raised from the ground. Alexis Speed would have to drive on until his petrol gave out, then...

dirt-track detective strained his ears to catch every word.

"All right, Cleft. You have done well. We have already netted fifty thousand pounds from bets on the races you have deliberately lost. Now we will pull off the big job and quit. Listen to your instructions." He paused and lit a cigar; then, watching the blue smoke rings curl upwards, he continued in curt, staccato tones. "To-morrow the Speed-drome stages the final race for the Gold Helmet. There will be the biggest attendance of the year—

and the takings will be huge. You will turn up as Jerry Wayt, and when the racing starts seek a private interview with the manager. He'll not suspect his star speedman of foul play, so it should be easy to knock him on the head and get the money from the safe. You will then drop the 'swag' through the window into a fast touring car I'll have waiting outside—and we'll make the getaway. You yourself must get out of the manager's room immediately—and disappear. You'll do that by simply removing your crash-helmet."

"Like this!" grinned Cleft, whipping off the leather motor-cycling helmet he had been wearing. As he did so Micky Wayt stifled a gasp of astonishment, for his amazing resemblance to Jerry had immediately disappeared! The head was lined and creased with crime—far different from the frank, clean-living Jerry Wayt.

"So," muttered Carlos. "Let me make sure about those finger-tips."

He drew the bogus speedman to the window, where stood a bench covered with scientific apparatus. Selecting a large microscope, Carlos examined Cleft's finger-tips closely.

"H'm. Fairly good—though the faked skin I grafted on is wearing slightly. Keep very still a few moments."

He picked up a smaller microscope, similar to those used by watch-makers, and screwing it in his eye peered at the faked finger-tips, while he worked on them carefully with a needle-like instrument; then he immersed both the impostor's hands in a bath of acid and told him to stand quietly until they dried.

"Ah, that's about right," said Carlos at last. "Don't forget to leave plenty of fingerprints about Hart's office when you pull the job. We'll fix it so that young Wayt shoulders the guilt."

A noise at the window caused him to swing round with a muttered curse. Looking through the panes, he saw Alexis Speed and the young dirt-track rider in desperate combat with half-a-dozen tough-looking antagonists.

"So-ho! Eavesdroppers!" exclaimed the hunch-backed plotter. "Lucky the gang spotted them."

The dirt-track detective and his companion had no chance. Sefton Carlos' men had come upon them unawares and had attacked from behind. Micky and Speed put up a terrific fight; but they were simply overwhelmed by tremendous odds and the blackjacks which each of the scoundrels wielded.

Battered and half-senseless, Alexis Speed, still calm, unconquered, and Micky Wayt were dragged into Sefton Carlos' presence. The hunchback regarded them narrowly.

"So you have thrust your head into the lion's mouth, Mr. Detective?" he hissed. "Then I suppose you are prepared to get bitten?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Crook," answered Speed calmly. "You see, I hope to draw the lion's teeth!"

"So? ... So?" There was a snarl in the hunchback's voice that told Speed he was getting rattled. "Well, I very much fear you will not be allowed to—er—draw the lion's teeth. I am going to lock you up pretty securely for the night, and to-morrow, Mr. Alexis Speed, you shall amuse me. I understand you are a skilful motor-cycle rider, eh? You shall ride one to-morrow for the last time—inside what I call the Cylinder of Death. Take them away!"

The Dirt-track Detective and Micky Wayt spent a more or less uncomfortable night in the prison to which Carlos had assigned them. This was a cellar of the old house—a place that dripped water from its stone ceiling, and that was also the abode of a numerous species of large, brown rat.

Dawn found the young speed crank on the verge of

dementia; Speed looked haggard, but was otherwise quite unmoved—and ice cool!

It was not until many hours later that a number of Sefton Carlos' unprepossessing minions entered the cellar. With their arms still securely bound, the prisoners were led up many stone steps into the open air.

The hunchback and Herman Cleft were awaiting them in an open space behind the house. They were standing beside what appeared to be a giant bowl. It was as big as a small house. Across the top, which was open to the sky, was a steel girder which was fastened to it securely. To this girder was attached the rope of a hand-worked derrick, erected beside the bowl.

"Well, my witty friend, I trust you enjoyed your sleeping quarters," greeted Carlos in a bantering tone. "Let me introduce to you the Cylinder of Death. You are going to ride a motor-cycle round inside it. Not the first time the feat has been achieved. I believe a similar arrangement, called the Wall of Death, is popular on some fair grounds in England and Australia. Your Wall of Death will be slightly different, however, because I have added a little extra feature to make it more interesting. It is simply this: When you have got well up the side of the wall, my men are going to raise the cylinder twenty feet in the air with the aid of the derrick. I'll leave you to imagine what will happen if you get tired—or if the petrol gives out!"

"You—ou scoundrel!" gritted Micky Wayt, struggling desperately to get at the hunchback.

"Don't worry, young man, you shall have your turn later," sneered Carlos. "I'm sorry I cannot stay to the end of the performance, but I have a pressing engagement elsewhere. I'll be back in time for the funeral, however! Get busy, men."

Alexis Speed did not attempt to struggle as he was hustled through a small door in the side of the metal bowl. Knowing it would be useless, he was conserving his energies for the time when they would be most needed. He was held firmly in the saddle of a motor-cycle, which was already inside the bowl, while his bonds were removed, and at a signal from Carlos the engine was started. Then one of the ruffians engaged the gear, and they shoved the bike forward. To keep his balance, Speed was forced to ride the machine round the gently sloping sides of the bowl. He tried to close the throttle—but found it had been jammed wide open. The motor-cycle was gaining speed every second—taking the detective higher and higher up the wall of the cylinder.

Chuckling, the ruffians in the cylinder slipped quickly through the door and closed it—leaving Speed hurtling round and round like a fly in a giant's sugar bowl. The thunder of the engine was deafening in the enclosed space; but Alexis Speed felt no sensation of dizziness. It was just as though he were riding in an ordinary upright position along an endless road.

He glanced sideways—which, of course, was really downwards—and though what he saw was really expected, it came as a distinct shock. For the cylinder had already been raised by the derrick. The figures of Sefton Carlos and Cleft were twenty feet below the edge of the suspended bowl. They seemed to be suspended horizontally in mid-air, with their feet glued to an immense wall! Carlos, who had been waiting for him to turn his head, now waved a mocking adieu and appeared to walk up the wall in uncanny fashion with his companion, until they rose out of the speedway sleuth's vision. Next moment Speed was wrestling with the handlebars, for in those few seconds the machine had slipped down nearly to the edge of the cylinder. He got swiftly to a safer altitude and considered his position.

YOUR EDITOR'S WONDERFUL NEWS



NEXT WEEK'S FREE GIFTS & GRAND DETECTIVE NUMBER



MY DEAR CHUMS,
I'm simply bubbling over with excitement and enthusiasm this week, chaps. I've pulled off a big job. Months ago it began. When a certain ex-member of Scotland Yard came in to see me, he had a neat box under his arm and told me to give the contents the "once over"—his own words. Well, I promptly did, and spent a fascinating hour testing the contents. That box contained a marvellous complete Amateur Detective Outfit—Fingerprint Taker, Invisible Ink, various charts and code apparatus; in fact, all the paraphernalia that an amateur sleuth could wish for! My visitor's suggestion was that I gave a few of these Outfits away as prizes in a competition. But I wanted to go one better than that. Why could not *all* my chums have one of these ripping outfits? For weeks I puzzled over the means whereby the various parts of the apparatus could be inserted between the pages of the *Mag.* and, at last, the problem was solved. The invisible ink was reduced to a powder which could be packeted, and the other things manufactured in flat, portable form so that you could collect them week by week and thus build up the

Complete Amateur Detective Outfit.

I have also formed The *Boys' Magazine* Amateur Detectives' Club. I want every reader of *Boys' Magazine* to be a member and I have designed a **Dandy Coloured Metal Badge**

Even if he held on to his nerve, the petrol in the tank would soon give out. The bike would then crash twenty feet to earth, and should it crush him under its two hundredweight, he would suffer a fall that would kill or severely maim him. Yet, wreck his brain as he would, he could think of no way out of the quandary. . . .

An hour passed—it seemed like an age to the sleuth, whose eyes were burning with the strain of keeping the machine in a safe path. And then, like a knell, there came a sudden *pop-pop* from the engine. It was faltering—the petrol was exhausted! Now for it!

"Curtains!" muttered Alexis Speed. "Ah, well—"

He broke off with an incredulous gasp. For he

which you can all wear in your buttonholes. There will be no forms to fill up, no coupons to collect to become a member. The badges will be inserted **INSIDE EVERY COPY OF NEXT WEEK'S *Boys' Magazine!***

Tell all your chums about this grand gift offer, tell them to get next week's *Boys' Magazine* and begin collecting an Amateur Detective Outfit. You can then form a detective club among yourselves and this great new gift will enable you to get up some wonderful stunts. News about the new club's progress will appear from time to time in the *B.M.*

Of course I have prepared a special programme of top-high thrill tales for the first of these special gift numbers next week. First a gripping new serial by H. Wedgwood Belfield entitled

Doom to the Flying Circus!

There, that's another cat out of the bag! Old readers will remember Dick Derring, the boy acrobat, Don Hawkins, and Jerry the Clown, not forgetting Baba the Elephant—who are just a few of the members of Sangster's Flying Circus. They appeared a few years ago in one of the most popular *Mag* tales. And here they are again—pitting their wits and courage once more against the menace of the Scared Hand. New readers are booked for as big a treat as my old chums when they get on to this great new tale of the circus and mystery next week.

(Continued on page 30.)

had taken another look at the earth. Instead of being twenty feet away from the edge of the bowl, it seemed to be rising to meet him!

There could be only one explanation! Someone was working the derrick—lowering the Cylinder of Death back to terra firma! With a slight jolt the contrivance touched earth, and with a sigh of relief Speed turned his mount from the sloping part, to which it had already slipped, on to the firm ground. As he did so and came to a standstill, the door burst open, and Micky Wayt appeared.

"Mr. Speed! Thank Heaven I was in time!"

"Thanks, Micky—thanks for saving my life!" said the Dirt-track Tee, and his voice had lost the faint, mocking note it usually held. "Shake!"

30-inch TELESCOPE 3/-



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When the two had clasped hands, Speed said: "Now tell me how you escaped."

"Oh, that was fairly easy this time," answered the young speedway ace. "You remember I had worn through half my bonds during the night on that jagged corner in the cellar. Well, when they put me back there, I nearly cheered. I finished off the ropes and shouted to the guard that I was suffocating. I was—with excitement. Well, he popped his head into the cellar and I bitted it. And here I am. There's no sign of Carlos and the rest of the gang."

"No—they've gone to the speedway," Speed looked at his wrist-watch. "Good heavens—nearly three o'clock. Come on—we've got to hustle if we're to make it in time. Fit it?"

"And how!" grinned Micky Wayt.

Smash and Grab at the Speed-drome.

LIKE four comets the speedrons roared forward as the blue peaked flag flashed down.

It was the final of the struggle for the Gold Helmet. The qualifying heats had been run off months before, and Jerry Wayt had been one of the four finalists.

Yet, as he took the bend in a clever broadside that brought him in front of the previous leader, his face wore a puzzled expression behind its mask of dirt. He had been kidnapped, blindfolded, and taken to an unknown destination, where he had been imprisoned for weeks in total darkness. To-day, however, he had been released in strange fashion. He had been taken a long journey—still blindfolded and gagged—and abandoned in the open air. Before they left him, one of his captors mentioned that the race for the Gold Helmet would commence at the Speed-drome one hour from then. That knowledge made Jerry work like a madman at his bonds. They were only loosely tied, and in ten minutes he was free and the gag and blindfold removed.

He found himself in the middle of a ploughed field. Beside him was his own speed-iron and he himself was clad in the padded dirt track outfit in which he had been kidnapped.

In the distance the spire of Kingston church gave him his bearings. One hour to get to the Speed-drome! He might just do it—if he let it rip!

He had to push the bike to the nearest road, but once there he didn't waste any more time. He went Londonwards at the full bat of his engine.

He packed almost as many thrills into that mad dash into and across London as he did on the track. But he managed it—with barely four minutes to spare.

Two minutes it took him to get his track crash-helmet from the dressing-room—which it should be noted was in the same block as the manager's office. He dashed back to the paddock and seized his mount from the ready hands of his mechanic.

He had the lead now—was drawing away from his

rivals, leaving behind a spray of upflung cinders like a comet's tail.

The next bend! His iron shod foot dug into the dirt and his back wheel slid sideways in a dizzy broadside. His bike bucked like a mad mule as he straightened her out, then he was hurtling on—to victory.

The rest never got a look in again. It was a procession to the winning line—with Jerry leading by lengths. But such an exhibition of cool skill, allied to dizzy speed, had perhaps never before been seen at the Speed-drome. And the crowd roared its appreciation in one continuous diapason.

Soon the wireless loud speakers were announcing Jerry as the winner, and he rode once round the track, to the plaudits of the onlookers, wearing the coveted trophy he had won in such spectacular fashion.

Then he dashed into the paddock to look for Micky. Instead of his brother he found a stern-faced man in a bowler hat and two police officers.

"You are under arrest for robbery with violence. I warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used as evidence!"

The solemn words, accompanied by the *click* of a pair of handcuffs snapping on to his wrists, dumb-founded Jerry. For a long moment he stared, then tried to explain the dreadful mistake.

"It's no use, young man. You were seen at the window of Manager Hart's office. It was you, in fact, who threw down the booty to the crooks in the car. And we have found your fingerprints on the safe."

"But that's impossible!" burst out the astounded speedman. "Why, I have been kept a prisoner for three weeks and was only released to-day. I came into the Speedway less than five minutes before the start of the race."

"Yes, we know you arrived late," assented the man from the Yard, "but you went into the Manager's office for a minute or so. And you have been riding at this track regularly during the last three weeks, so you cannot have been a prisoner. Come, it's no use lying, my boy. Mr. Hart himself identifies you as his assailant."

He was led away before the startled gaze of those who had been applauding him but five minutes ago. Through the main building the detective and his charge went and out into the road where a police car waited.

Before Jerry could be bundled inside, however, an amazing thing happened. An open touring car crashed to a standstill alongside the pavement. At the wheel, Jerry's bewildered eyes descried a lean-faced, distinguished looking man. Beside him sat none other than his brother, Micky Wayt. In the back seat were crowded half-a-dozen crooks, looking very much the worse for wear, and the stolen booty from the Speedway.

"All right, Brown," said Alexis Speed calmly to the astounded detective. "Here are your men. You can let young Wayt off those handcuffs. I can prove his innocence to the hilt."

While the policeman drove the prisoners in the Bentley to the station, Speed led the detective, the two brothers, and Herman Cleft into Manager Hart's office. Here he showed Brown the bogus Speedman's faked fingerprints and told him the full story of the gigantic criminal plot of Sefton Carlos.

The dirt track detective and Micky had captured the Bentley and its crook cargo between Carlos' house and the Speedway. In the terrific fight that ensued, however, Sefton Carlos had made his getaway, leaving his minions to face the music.

Bulldog Hamilton features in an amazing Mystery yarn next week, chaps. The greatest FREE Gift Offer ever made appears with next week's number. Ripping Amateur Detective Outfits FREE to every reader.

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.

Burglar: Lumme, Bill, that ain't a safe; that's a wireless set!
(Football to THOMAS SMITH, 8, Ridsdale Avenue, Withington.)

CAPPED.

"If you please, Mrs. Brown, Johnnie's cap is in the pond."

"Then where is Johnnie?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"If you please, he's in his cap."

(Fountain pen to LESLIE CHAMBERLAIN, 3, Bell Cottages, Eton Wick, near Windsor, Bucks.)

JOKE COUPON.

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

6/5/33.

HAIR RAISING.

JOHNNY: Jimmy's gone home and I've no one to play Red Indians with!

OLD GRANDAD: Never mind, my lad; I will play with you.

JOHNNY: You are no good; you're scalped already.

(Fountain pen to IVAN G. BAILEY, 54, Mill Street, Barwell, Leicestershire.)

CONDENSED.

BIG BOY: Why don't you grow any bigger?

LITTLE FRIEND: 'Cos I used to be fed on short cakes and condensed milk.

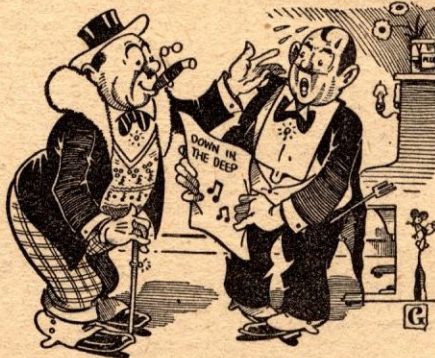
(Fountain pen to GEORGE HOLLAND, 6, Haddon Road, off Mayors Walk, Peterborough.)

THAT CAPS IT.

TAILOR: A straw hat or a felt one, sir?

FARMER: A straw one. It's always a mouthful for the cow when I've finished with it!

(Fountain pen to FRED SHEPHERD, 5, Clegg Street, Milnrow, near Rochdale.)



Nervous Baritone: I hope I shall be a success with the audience to-night.

Manager: If you're not, we'll throw him out.

(Football to ALBERT BERRY, 95, King's Road, Haslemere, Surrey.)

TROUBLE AHEAD.

BEN (on top of ladder): I can't get down, Bill!

BILL: Come down the way you went up!

BEN: I can't. I came up head first.

(Fountain pen to W. JONES, 1, Tip Row, Hafod, Swansea.)

TOO TRUE.

DAD: Do you know what I have done with my saw, Bob?

BOBBIE: Yes, Dad!

DAD: Well, what have I done with it?

BOBBIE: Lost it!

(Fountain pen to REGINALD BLYTH, Beccles Road, Roveningham, Norwich.)

NOT TOOTHsome.

DINER: What's that, waiter?

WAITER: A glass of toothpicks, sir!

DINER: Well, take them away! Johnny's just eaten the last lot and he doesn't like them!

(Fountain pen to ERNEST NEWMAN, 4, St. Hilda's Grove, Cross Green Lane, Leeds, 9, Yorks.)

A GROWTH.

MASTER: What did Adam first plant in the Garden of Eden?

JONES: His foot!

(Fountain pen to M. LE BLANCO, South View, Samarassy, Jersey, C.I.)

AN OPERATION.

EXAMINER (to applicant for job as telephone operator): Have you had any operating experience?

APPLICANT: Oh, yes; I've had my tonsils removed!

(Fountain pen to RAYMOND KEELING, 48, Monnow Street, Monmouth.)

THE SPEED-FILLED, THRILL-CROWDED EXPLOITS OF TWO DEMON ACES OF THE AIR!

TAILS-UP DRAKE—SKY SCORPION!
In Another Daredevil Exploit. You'll Enjoy Every Word of this Gripping New Flying Series, Chums. Telling How Squadron-Leader Geoffrey Drake and his Comical Irish Observer Fought the Film-plotter Garson and his Foreign Minions. **THIS WEEK'S THRILL: IN THE TENTACLES OF THE SKY MONSTER!**

Aboard the Air Monster.

SQUADRON LEADER GEOFFREY DRAKE'S roaring Hart came rocketing through the clouds, a tight formation of Hawker Furies manoeuvring with the precision of cavalry behind his streamered tail.

He rocked his wings, signalling to the fighters to continue down to where the orange boundary lights of Flamborough aerodrome gleamed through the darkness.

For several hours Tails-Up Drake had hurtled with his fighters through the dead, ice-cold world fifty thousand feet above the earth. He had been searching for the sky monster, which he knew was directing the sinister schemes of Phillip Garson—alias Red Garson—to smash Britain's Air Power. The apparently peaceful project of preparing a great Air Force film cloaked the sinister plot.

He had failed to find the aerial mammoth with its mystery crew of international plotters. The Furies' guns, primed to shatter the giant with lead and flame, had returned with their ammo drums intact.

Drake was anxious. Phillip Garson was filming the manoeuvres of the Fleet Air Arm to-night. And the airman was on the alert for treachery, as he swung the hurtling Hart towards the dark heights of Flamborough Head.

Through the North Sea mists he saw the tapering grey hull of the aircraft carrier *Hercules* with its attendant destroyers. In the bows great hydraulic lifts were raising the fast Fleet Spotters and Blackburn Hart torpedo droppers from the hangars.

Tails-Up Drake banked dizzily into the wind, jockeying to "land" on the great steel deck three thousand feet below.

In accordance with his secret orders, the squadron leader was playing a lone hand against Red Garson, to allow the super crook to carry on with his bogus film-making, until the ringleaders behind the menace could be trapped.

Near to where the white trail of steam, gushing from the pipe in the aircraft carrier's bows, gave the pilots the wind direction, Drake saw Garson's men grouped round their cameras.

"I'd feel easier if we'd found Garson's flying headquarters to-night," he jerked over his shoulder to Air Mechanic Patrick Murphy. "Sooner or later that brute is coming to earth to co-operate with Garson's gang."

Bonehead Murphy grunted.

"Shure an' it's slippery spalpeens they are, sorr," said the little Irishman's tired voice.

Below, the roar of two Hawker Nimrod fleet spotters, zooming up into the night from the *Hercules*' floodlit deck, rose above the boom of the breakers.

The planes were climbing in a wide circle, and suddenly from their chemically doctored exhausts spurted heavy black smoke, that drifted slowly down to the grey waters like a giant shroud.

It was a preliminary to the night's manoeuvres, the aerial smoke screen to protect the aircraft carrier from torpedo attack.

Drake swung down the Hart's silver nose, preparing to dive into the slip stream of the Nimrods, when he felt Murphy's hand grip his shoulder.

"Begorra, d'ye hear that, sorr?" the stocky little Irishman exclaimed, in his broad brogue.

Drake throttled back the roaring Rolls, and thrust his leather-clad head out of the streamlined cockpit.

His jaw set grimly as the throb of massed engines vibrated his eardrums.

The Sky Monster! The deep organ note of the clustered Mercedes had been impressed indelibly on his brain, in moments of peril.

He could not fail to recognise it again.

He yanked open the throttle and like a live thing the blue-grey Hart leapt towards the great smoke screen. It shot through the shroud of black vapour into the still air beyond.

For a moment he thought his imagination had tricked him. The throb of the engines had died away. There seemed nothing but the silent darkness beneath the low storm clouds.

"There's the black divil, sorr," yelled Murphy.

Tails-Up Drake jerked his gaze over the Hart's quivering tail. He saw a black, sinister shape dropping silently down to the waters, its dark, belying gasbag, with the streamlined power shells, blending with the darkness.

Drake cried out grimly as he realised the cleverness of the crooks' strategy. Making full use of the flying dreadnought's great speed, the monster had dived out of the storm clouds to the shelter of the smoke screen.

"What devilry are they hatching?" he gritted.

He dived nearer, his narrowed eyes watching the only gleam of light that came from the silenced night

The Torpedo Trap!



marauder. That faint glow of mercury vapour lamps came from the observation window of the starboard gondola.

Drake caught a glimpse of the crouching figures as he flashed past, saw a giant torpedo sliding down a tilting trough, into a firing tube in the gondola floor.

The betraying clamour of his engine brought the crooks' heads jerking up. He caught a fleeting glimpse of their startled faces as he zoomed away.

In a flash Drake realised the sinister purpose of the night marauder. That giant torpedo was intended for the *Hercules*. With characteristic cunning the crooks were using the protection of the smoke screen to smash the ship, with its million pound cargo of fleet fighters, to destruction.

At any moment that giant torpedo would be sent hurtling towards its target. Drake must act swiftly if dreadful disaster was to be averted. He saw suddenly what he must do.

"Hold tight Murphy," he yelled over his shoulder.

He opened out the thundering rolls, as he hurled the quivering Hart into a fierce power dive. With a scream of wires he went crashing down to the gondola, where death was being unleashed.

The gondola window flashed into the quivering circle of his gun sights. Grinily he set the twin Vickers chattering, booming a long burst of flaming lead through the glass.

He had a fleeting glimpse of scattering figures. Then the bullet slashed gondola was plunged suddenly into darkness.

The aerial monster quivered like a wounded thing; then with thrashing helicopters it rose at an amazing speed, shooting vertically upwards into the storm clouds.

"That's put the wind up the spalpeen," Murphy grunted.

Drake's fighting blood was up now. He pulled out of the hurtling dive, and whipping open the leading edge slots went crashing into the cloud strata in fierce pursuit. The swirling cloud vapour momentarily blinded him. His hand shot towards the throttle, as the throb of the massed Mercedes engines suddenly echoed perilously near.

As he yanked up the nose of the thundering Hart, a vague, intangible shape leaped across the silver bows. He stalled dizzily hanging on his slots, but sinister, tendril-like things were closing round his queerly suspended plane twining about the wings and fuselage like giant fingers.

The propeller jerked spasmodically and the engine stopped. Yet eerily the plane was still rising swiftly; was being dragged up into the night. Drake swung his long limbs out of the cockpit and yanked the ring of his parachute. The silk bellowed out and was instantly torn to destruction against the mystery tentacles.

Murphy's doleful voice came from the rear cockpit as his parachute suffered a similar fate.

"Shure and bejabers, it's lost that we are intoirely, sorr. I knew it would be trouble oi'd be foinding when oi lost me piece of lucky Shamrock."

For all the danger of the situation Drake laughed. He stood up in the tilting cockpit, looking around him.

He knew from grim experience that Red Garson's gang were using advanced discoveries of aerial science to aid their sinister plans. But this startling, uncanny trap completely mystified him.

And he was helpless. The wireless aerial was broken. That cut out any chance of securing aid from the fleet fighters who were unaware of his peril.

Drake leant from the cockpit and examined one of the taut strands of the strange web. There was nothing particularly mysterious about that. It was steel cable. He had flown into what appeared to be a giant air net.

The cloud vapour made detailed investigation impossible. But to his relief the Hart did not appear to be badly damaged. Yet it seemed humanly impossible to get the machine out of that tenacious web.

At length, the swinging Hart was lifted above the drifting vapour, up into the silent starlit world above the clouds.

The huge, black snadow of the air giant above them fell across the uplifted faces of the trapped airmen. The things that had puzzled Drake now became clear. He saw that the giant defence net was splayed from beneath the gondolas on rollers meshed with coiled springs and rubber shock absorbers to take the strain.

A face was staring down at him from the shattered gondola window, a heavy jeweled face with eyes gleaming, as though lit with

hidden fires, and reflecting something that was utterly ruthless and cruel.

The mystery leader of the Bolshevik confederation plotting to smash Britain's Air Power! Drake groaned with the realisation of his helplessness.

He heard a guttural order drift from the gondola. Then a line of swarthy attackers came clambering down the swaying cables of the sky net.

Drake's brain was working with lightning speed, probing every chance of escape. His anxious eyes flashed along the line of gondolas clustered beneath

the medley of levers and switches beyond confirmed his belief that it was the control cabin.

Grasping the metal ridge beneath the window he drew himself up and quickly surveyed the interior. There was only one man in the gondola, the pilot who was bending over the wheel.

Drake loosened the gun in his holster and swung back his gloved fist. That movement silhouetted against the lighted window gave the watching crooks a clue to his daring move.

Bullets splattered around him, beating a deadly tattoo against the gondola walls. One lucky shot heaped him in his daring purpose as it shattered the control room window.

His crashing gauntlet enlarged the opening, and he yanked himself upwards, thrusting his shoulders through the shattered casement.

The pilot whipped round, as Drake dropped on to the metal floor. The young airman groaned for in the man's hand an automatic gleamed ominously.

"Put up your hand," a guttural voice snarled.

But the crook had not seen Bonehead Murphy's diminutive figure sliding through the shattered casement. For a vital moment he was hidden by Drake's tall figure, a moment when Murphy swiftly sized up the situation. He sidestepped and flung himself at the

crook's legs. He went down with a crash, the gun spinning from his fingers, and he lay still.

"Good lad," Drake grunted. "Truss him up." He tossed some cords down from a metal shelf. While the mechanic secured the crook, Drake clamped home the bolts of the control room door, and fastened the steel shutters across the shattered casement.

The Torpedo Terror.

THROUGH sheer pluck and resource Drake had gained control of the air monster. If he had any doubt that the gondola contained the main arteries of the mammoth's machinery, they were dispelled by the tumult that came suddenly from beyond the locked and bolted door.

"You blundering fools!" he heard a guttural voice yelling. "You must get him. Do you want that accursed Britisher to fly us into the hands of the Air Force?"

"Shure it's rattled that they are," muttered Murphy. "But now we're in, sorr, sure and bejaspers how do we get out?"



BLAZING AWAY AT 'EM.—Drake seized the blow lamp from one of his attackers and turned the searing flame on the crooks, who reeled back, yelling with pain.

the air monster. And suddenly a daring plan leapt to his brain.

"Come on, Murphy. The Air Force isn't beaten yet," he grunted.

He swung himself out of the cockpit and dropped precariously on to the cables. Bonehead, looking more glum and melancholy than ever, gingerly slithered after his chief.

A burly ruffian came sliding down a twanging cable to cut off the fugitives. Drake hung on perilously with one hand and hooked a good British fist to the crook's jaw. With a yell the fellow went slithering down the net, until a cable hooked his sagging body and he hung limply, like a sack.

His fellow ruffians grew more wary. Stabs of flame spilt the darkness, as they opened fire on the fugitives. But the Britishers clambering perilously across that black abyss of space were elusive targets in the darkness.

At last, his breath coming in painful gasps, Drake hauled himself up the quivering cable beneath the diamond-shaped gondolas in the bows of the air giant. A swift glance through the lighted window at

"We don't," laughed Drake. "We're going to fly this brute back to Flamborough Aerodrome."

He glanced uneasily towards the door that was quivering with hammer blows. Could he get the air giant down to earth before the crooks found a means of breaking through that steel barrier?

He bent over the great control board, swiftly trying to probe its mechanical secrets. He spotted a master throttle which controlled the whole of the power plant. He yanked it forward. The engine revolution needles behind the glass facets flickered over to the fifteen hundred mark. There came a mighty roar, as the massed engines of the aerial monster thundered into life.

The air giant leapt like a live thing, and snatching at the elevator control, Drake pushed it forward. The monster whipped down its nose flinging the Britishers against the control board with the violence of its dive.

The roar was deafening, the mighty mass of metal and gas-filled silk was vibrating fearfully.

"Faith, she'll never hold together, sorr," muttered Murphy, anxiously.

"We've got to risk that," Drake snapped.

The clamour beyond the metal door had ceased, but Drake did not doubt that more effective methods of breaking through the barrier were being sought.

It was a grim race against time. And as he watched the altimeter needles tensely, he seemed to be winning.

The giant was swiftly losing height. Nineteen thousand feet . . . eighteen thousand . . .

Suddenly the thunderous roar of the engines faltered and commenced to fade. Drake groaned, as through the oil-flecked observation panel he saw dark figures moving quickly along the narrow gangways leading to the power eggs. The crooks were cutting off the petrol with the taps of the feed pipes.

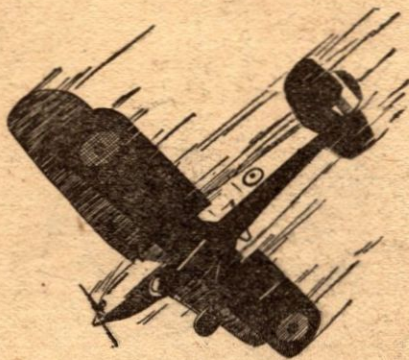
door, sorr," warned Murphy, his ear pressed against the panels. "Blow lamps, sorr. They're burning out the hinges."

The ominous hiss of concentrated flame searing the metal door was now to be plainly heard. There was no counter move against the crooks' fresh attack. Drake could only hang on!

He watched the altimeter grimly. Five thousand feet and they were still in the clouds. Murphy's warning cry, rising above the renewed hammer blows against the door, told the squadron leader that the barrier was giving.

Next moment the hinges gave way with a rending, tearing noise, and the steel barrier twisted on its bolts. A surge of menacing figures burst into the control cabin.

A grim fighting figure, Drake hurled himself at those swarthy attackers. Whipping a hissing blow-lamp from a burly crook's hand he slashed it round, the flame searing the startled crooks' faces. They reeled back with yells of mingled pain and rage. A resourceful Murphy ambling to the switchboard had



DRIVING TO DOOM!—Drake swooped down, his machine-gun chattering. Could he smash the propellers of the torpedo, ere it struck the aircraft carrier, without hitting his pal?

The engines turned over for a few more moments, as they drained the carburettors and then cut out completely.

The altimeter needle flickered. The monster's crashing dive to earth was checked, but with the elevators jammed at an acute angle the machine was still losing height.

"The spalpeens are up to some divilry behind this

out the lights. The control room was plunged into sudden blackness, adding to the confusion.

"Quick!" Drake caught Murphy's shoulder and charged his way through the crooks. They were clear and racing along a darkened passage, the din of pursuit close behind them.

They reached a spiral staircase and went clattering down. The cool night air fanned Drake's throbbing

temples as he plunged out on the narrow gangway leading to the port side power eggs.

Below, the meshed cables of the defence net gleamed through the darkness, the suspended Hart still slung in the giant web.

The sight of his machine quickened the desperate plan that had been born in Drake's mind, when he had snatched the blow-lamp from his attacker.

Yelling to Murphy to follow, he dropped from the gangway down to the quivering net. The blow-lamp still gripped in his hand, he slithered, with reckless speed, down to the suspended biplane.

Then he was crouching beneath the port side wing, his body wedged in the undercarriage struts, and he frantically worked the air pump of the blow-lamp.

The flame swiftly charged into the bluish hue of concentrated heat. He thrust the searing jet against the cable wrapped about the undercarriage, turning the metal into molten rain.

In those vital moments when his crouching figure was hidden beneath the biplane's wings, he gained precious time. The crooks had for the moment lost

rudder bar, steadying the plunging machine. He switched on, waiting for the propeller to suck petrol vapour into the cylinders.

The Rolls spluttered and then picked up with a throaty roar. Drake's face was anxious as he swung the quivering nose back towards the air monster. He had got to save Murphy. But how?

He stood suddenly on the rudder bar, pulling the screaming Hart away from the hurtling black mass that came smashing down on him. A great rush of air beat like giant hands against his face as the air monster zoomed past him in a thundering power dive.

He flung the Hart into a dizzy dive, following the giant where a terrific slip stream tossed the smaller machine like a cork.

He did not doubt that some sinister purpose lay behind that fierce dive down towards the *Hercules*, which lay rolling in the grey waters now only a thousand feet below.

Grimly apprehensive, he saw the monster's black nose suddenly whip upwards, its massed engines roaring. Sheer brute power sent it zooming back into the low cloud strata.

But Drake's eyes were no longer on the sky marauder. He saw a giant torpedo plunge into the water, and his face grew tense. He realised at last the purpose of the monster's daring dive.

With a line of foam spreading from its whirling propellers, the torpedo was streaking towards the *Hercules*.

Drake's hand clenched on the control stick and he flung the Hart into a screaming power dive. He pulled out over the hurtling torpedo and it was then that he saw Murphy's rigid figure bound on that whining thing of death, leaping towards the *Hercules*. The moment of grim indecision that came to Drake then, seemed like an eternity to the young airman's tortured mind.

Murphy's peril had thrown into chaos his desperate plan to explode the torpedo before it reached its quarry, by riddling it with bullets.

Yet the aircraft carrier with its men and machines must somehow be saved. The leaping torpedo was within twenty yards of the long, grey hull. It was too late for the *Hercules'* engines to swing the ship clear.

Drake caught a fleeting glimpse of a motor-boat swirling away from the ship, saw Red Garson and his men hurtling like rats to safety. The exultant expression on the super crook's swarthy face steeled him in his sudden desperate decision.

He swung the Hart into a vertical bank, whipping the silver nose down to the droning torpedo.

Beads of perspiration rolled down his set face as he ran his eyes along the sights. Then he goaded himself to clench his hand on the machine-gun grip, dreading lest that hail of lead should mutilate Murphy's splayed body.

Crack! Crack! Crack! A stream of bullets lashed the water, but a second burst smashed the torpedo's whirling propellers.

The drone of the powerful air engines faltered and died. The torpedo quivered, slowed its pace and floated lifelessly on the water.

Drake drew a heartfelt breath of relief. The danger to the *Hercules* and its million-pound cargo of fleet fighters was averted.

But what of Murphy? Drake dived closer to the floating torpedo. To his relief he saw that the little Irishman was unscathed.

Drake waved a reassuring hand, and, as a seaplane tender swirled to the rescue, he swung the Hart towards the aircraft carrier.

The Dandy Cowboy in a smashing yarn of the West next week, when he meets Red Mask of the Rio Grande the scourge of the plains. Amateur Detective Outfits FREE to every reader next week.

FREE! **Next Week!**



Here is a reproduction of the Grand Badge Given Away Next Week inside Every Copy of the Mag., chums. Printed in Full Colours on Metal this Dandy Shield will Look Fine in Your Buttonholes. It is the First Gift in The Great New Gift Series Forming OUR FREE AMATEUR DETECTIVE OUTFITS.

their quarry, and they combed the passages of the air monster in vain.

Desperately Drake pumped more air into the hissing container. The flame had cut through one cable and was devouring another. The undercarriage wheels were almost free. As the second cable snapped, the Hart lurched and slowly commenced to roll, its great weight dragging it free.

With a triumphant yell to Murphy, Drake leapt for the fuselage. He crashed into the cockpit as the Hart's silver nose slid from the broken cables.

Murphy came slithering down the net. But even as the Hart broke free, a burly crook leapt down the swaying cables and yanked an arm around the little Irishman's throat in a stranglehold.

The Hart shot away from the air-giant in a spinning, uncontrolled dive, and Drake was powerless to assist his Irish pal.

He grabbed the control stick and kicked at the

RIVAL GHOSTS!

Another Explosive Mirthquake, Featuring THE CREW OF THE "HAPPY HADDOCK."



Sailors' Yarns.

FAT BURNS flashed a sly wink across the table at Slim Small, his fellow seaman. They were sitting in a dockside coffee shop, whence they had been lured by the callow, immaculate youth who was with them, eager for yarn spinning. He had treated them handsomely and now they were giving him the yarns he wanted—as vivid as their imaginations could make them!

"That's right," said Fat. "Them flyin' fish can loop-the-loop better'n any airplane. When I was in the Solomon Islands, I remember 'em flyin' round the masthead thicker'n wasps round a jamport!"

"I can hardly believe it!" gaped the youth. "Your lives must be frightfulay romahntic—what? Adventchah an' all that!"

"Adventure! Why, sink the ole lugger!" said Slim, "me an' me shipmate here's bin near death so often we get bored w' it! I mind the time when I captured ten thousand savage Equinoxes single handed!"

There seemed to be no limit to the amount of tall tales the foppish young man would swallow. He seemed to drink in every word greedily, and encouraged by this the two merry tars from the good ship *Happy Haddock*, which lay-to in a near-by dock, proceeded from extravagance to extravagance.

"Buried treasure, now," Fat Burns said, after Slim had concluded a lengthy narrative. "I know where there's a boxful o' pirate gold waitin' for the taking. On a little island it is, just off the coast of Venezuela. A million quid or more, I reckon!"

"Dash it all! Do you really! Why don't you go an' get it?"

"Aw—gold ain't no good to me! I'm a seatarin'

The Funniest Tale of a Treasure Hunt Ever Told. The Gay Salts of the Good Ship, "Happy Haddock"—Haunted!

man! Me heart's wrapped up in the sea! I ain't riskin' nuth'n from the evils a' riches!"

Fat Burns took a grubby sheet of paper from his pocket and a stub of pencil

which he proceeded to lick thoughtfully.

"Lemme see, now. The island were 'bout a degree an' a half west o' Trinidad. Shaped summat arter this style."

And he proceeded to trace a shape on the paper. As a matter of fact Fat did know of such an island. Years ago the ship he was serving on had stopped to refill her water kegs there—but the business about the treasure, of course, was pure fiction.

"That's where the treasure lies," he concluded, marking a heavy black cross in the geometrical centre of the island. "In a palm grove, buried about two foot below ground. When I found it I put it back immediate knowin' it'd only cause a lot o' trouble an' strife."

The credulous listener was speechless. He gazed at Fat's crude map, and his eyes looked as though they were about to pop out of their sockets.

"Well," grinned Slim, glancing up at the coffee room clock. "I reckon we'd better be getting back aboard, shipmate. So long, mate. Thanks for the vittals."

Fat and Slim rolled out of the café with a vague feeling that they had, perhaps, carried their yarning a little too far. They left the credulous one still gazing spellbound at Fat's crude map. Claude Prune was a simple soul, and the possibility that the two sailors had been pulling his leg, never occurred to him. At last he took up the map, stowed it carefully in his pocket, and left the coffee-shop, his brain seething with romantic dreams.

When Fat Burns and Slim Small got back aboard the *Happy Haddock*, they found things just as glum as they had been when they went ashore. The *Happy Haddock*, be it known, was an ancient vessel, and her skipper and owner, Cap'n Keelson, found it more and more difficult to keep her busy. Merchants, seeking a ship to carry their wares, took one look at the *Haddock's* dented hull and tottering salt-caked chimney-stack, and hurried off elsewhere. Now here was Cap'n Keelson once again without a hope of a cargo and the dock charges mounting up daily!

"No luck?" inquired Fat as he reached the deck.

"No! De Cap'n vas desprit," said Dutchy Jud, the bos'n.

"Bin wanderin' round the stevedore's offices all day lookin' for a contract," said Mister Hettup, the mate, with a sad shake of the head. "Nuth'n doin'!"

Under Sealed Orders.

JOY returned to the old ship on the morrow, however. Cap'n Keelson suddenly emerged from his cabin and gave the glad message that all was well again.

"We're clearin' for South America to-night, Mister," he told the mate. "We're sailin' in ballast, an' under sealed orders, y'understand?"

"Aye, aye, Cap'n. I'll get the men busy, right now!"

It took exactly three minutes for the news to flash round the ship.

"Sink the ole lugger!" commented Slim. "Sealed orders! What's that?"

"Means it's gotta be kep' a secret," answered the all-knowing Pip. "But if you ask me I reckon we're sailin' under a private charter. Saw a posh sorta bloke come aboard this mornin' an' go into the Cap'n's cabin. Got an idea he's comin' with us!"

They did not know immediately whether Pip was right or not, for the *Haddock* cleared on the flood tide at about nine in the evening and they were kept too busy.

For four days, as the stormy Northern seas gave place slowly to tropic warmth, the mysterious commission of the *Happy Haddock* was the chief topic in the fo'cas'le. The solution of the mystery came at last in a startling manner.

Fat Burns, while busying himself on deck, had occasion to go aft near the skipper's quarters. He rounded the corner of the rear deckhouse and bumped violently into somebody. The sudden impact seated him somewhat firmly upon the deck.

"You clumsy great son of a sea-clam!" he roared. "Why can't you look what you're running in to! I'll—"

"Beg your pardon, I'm shah!"

Fat's threat died on his lips at the voice. He looked up and gazed in amazement at the man who stood over him. It was Claude Prune!

"Why, dash it all! You're the fellah who told me about the treashah! What an absolutely top-hole stroke of luck!"

"Gor!" choked Fat, remaining seated on the deck. "Where you sprung from?"

"Unfortunately I've been unable to leave the cabin since we set sail. Sea-sickness, y'know. I'm all right nah! This is frightfullay lucky, what? Do you know I've chartered this very ship to go an' look for that treashah you told me about, and heah I find you a membah of the crew. I will inform Cap'n Keelson immediatelay! He will be delighted!"

"Wait!" shrieked Fat, grabbing him by the arm. "D-does the Cap'n know?"

"He knows what I'm aftah, of course. He doesn't know where I got my information about the treashah. But I'm shah he'll be overjoyed—"

"D-don't t-tell him!" spluttered Fat. "Y'see—well it's like this—the fact is—I mean. Well, he'll be jealous, y'see. He'll think I ought to have told him, y'see!"

"I nevah thought of thaht," said Claude Prune thoughtfully. "All right, we'll keep it a secret between ourselves. I suppose the othah sailah I met in the café is aboard the ship too, eh?"

Fat nodded weakly. His brain was working full throttle. If the skipper found out the truth about it, he certainly would have it in for Fat—but not through jealousy! For Cap'n Keelson would immediately recognise that treasure as pure invention, and would have to inform Claude Prune of the fact.

"It's jolly unfortunate your friend and yourself don't believe in riches," burbled Claude. "I would gladly share the treashah with you. Well, toodle-pip, old chappie, and mum's the word!"

Fat gave a feeble grin and tottered away to the fo'cas'le where he laid himself on his bunk and moaned.

"Sink the ole lugger!" said Slim. "You ill!"

"Ill! I'm dyin' o' apprehension!" replied Fat and weakly stammered out the dreadful truth. Slim Small's round face turned a pale green as he listened.

"Sink the ole lugger! Him aboard in search of that non-existent treasure—and four days out to sea already!"

"Just a minute," said young Pip, the cabin boy, who had also heard. "Does the island exist, or did you invent that as well when you were baiting him?"

"The island's there all right, but—"

"Shurrup! I'm thinkin'!"

Fat and Slim looked at their young shipmate hopefully. The cabin boy had a reputation for ingenuity aboard the ship.

"There's only one thing," he said at last. "They mustn't find the treasure!"

"That won't offer no difficulties," said Fat with sarcasm, "considerin' there ain't no such—"

"I mean they mustn't even look for it," interrupted Pip. "They must think the treasure's there—but they daren't get it, see. The island's gotta be haunted! You told him it was pirate treasure, didn't you! Well, pirates always left a castaway to starve on the islands where they buried their loot, so's he'd die an' his ghost would haunt the spot for ever an' keep away intruders. Listen, we're bound to touch at some port 'fore we make the island. Most-like we can get hold of some false whiskers to disguise you as the ghost of the pirate's castaway."

"Me!" said Fat, sitting up suddenly. "Why me!"

"'Cos you're the skinniest, stupid. Castaways is always half-starved lookin', like you, an' they has long white whiskers an' laughs fiendish!"

"How'd you laugh fiendish?" moaned Fat.

"Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee!" said Pip. "Like that. An' then you gotta say 'fifteen men on a dead man's chest!' an' things like that! Come on, let's have a rehearsal right away."

Rivals.

Pip was right. The *Happy Haddock* stood in for the West Indian port of Porto Rico on the ninth day out. Cap'n Keelson and Claude Prune wished to verify the position of the island if possible, without, of course, giving away their object.

In Porto Rico, Pip managed to slip ashore and buy what he wanted—a long white false beard and a towled wig, with which to disguise Fat as the ghostly castaway.

Claude and the skipper soon verified the existence and position of the island, but not without rousing some curiosity as to their business there. On their

way back to the ship neither of them noticed that they were being followed by a repulsive-looking dock lounge, who had overheard them making their inquiries.

When they got back aboard the *Haddock* and went below together to the Cap'n's cabin, the man who followed crept surreptitiously up the gangway, and after a careful look round, went over to the hatch above the Cap'n's cabin and listened at the open fanlight.

Presently, the skipper and Claude left the cabin. The listener leaned precariously through the open fanlight and managed to clutch Claude's rough map. Producing a pencil and another scrap of paper, he made a hurried copy, and replaced the map on the cabin table.

Nobody saw the eavesdropper leave the *Happy Haddock*. Once ashore he hurried along the dock to a ramshackle schooner moored near by. He boarded it and went aft to the cabin, where sat a villainous-looking Caribbean trading-skipper.

The man who had copied the map told what he had heard excitedly.

"Treasure, you say!" The skipper's eyes goggled greedily. "Lemme see the map!"

"Arf a minute!" the other replied. "What's my share in the doin's?"

"I'll go fifty-fifty—with my ship! Lemme see the map!"

The map was handed over.

"But you'll have to look smart! It's a steamer," said the man who had copied the map. "You better git under way right now, if you're gonna git there first!"

"We will," said the schooner master, grinning greasily. "An' I got an' idea. You know the old legends 'bout pirates killing one of their crew on the spot where they buried their treasure—did it so's his ghost'd haunt the spot they say—well, I guess a ghost's gonna haunt this here island—see?"

The Treasure Hunt.

IT took all of that night and the following day for the old *Haddock* to cover the final lap to the alleged treasure island. They arrived there just about sundown, some hours behind the schooner, which had slid sleekly into the natural harbour on the other side of the island.

This was Fat Burns' cue to get busy. With the assistance of Pip he was disguised in a long white beard and wig. A tattered shirt and a pair of old trousers with one leg missing from the knee, transformed him into a perfect castaway. The final ghostly effect was obtained by a generous application of luminous paint.

"Fine!" said Pip, admiring him proudly. "Come on. We gotta slip away in one of the boats while the Cap'n and Claude is below decks."

Slim and Dutchy, who were also in the secret, quietly lowered a light dinghy, and in a few moments Pip was rowing the ghostly castaway towards the shore. They arrived, hid the boat, and then plunged through the tropical undergrowth towards a clump of palms that loomed weirdly in the twilight.

Hardly had they left the shore than a group of men, headed by the schooner captain, hove in sight

(Continued on page 36.)



RIVAL GHOSTS!—The skeleton stepped into the clearing, and saw facing him the ghost of the legendary castaway. With yells of terror both ghosts turned and fled.

OUR GIGANTIC TALE OF THE SECRET SERVICE

THE MASTER OF MASKS

By JOHN HUNTER

A Story of Spies, Kings, Intrigue — and a Mystery. Featuring Billy Trent, Mr. Sentence of the Secret Service and The Dreaded One Over Seven.



A Rat Trap! And a strange prisoner, held like a Rat in the Trap! That was the mystery Billy Trent was out to solve. With his allies, Mr. Grame Sentence, an agent of the British Secret Service, and Fritz, a German, Billy came up against immense, evil forces—The Society of Seven. At their head was One Over Seven, known as the Master of Masks. In Lithkrania, a small state in Europe, the mystery had its foundation, and to the Schloss of Stahnfeld the trail led the Secret Service Trio. Ere they reached the Castle, Billy and Fritz were embroiled in a revolution, and fell into the hands of the Lithkranian army. The sergeant leading their captors stared at Billy as if he recognised him.

The Sergeant's Secret.

THE sergeant—they guessed his rank by the three stars on his sleeve—was an elderly man, probably fifty years of age. He had fought through many battles as the ribbons on his chest proclaimed. Of those ribbons, the nearest to the buttons of his jacket was a bright scarlet with a little crown of metal at its middle. His memory stirring, Billy realised what that scarlet, crowned ribbon was. He had seen an illustration of all military honours in a boys' paper he had read in England.

The sergeant had been awarded the Crowned Cross, the highest Lithkranian war award; and as Billy stood and looked at the piece of ribbon, while the sergeant continued to stare at him, that ribbon became more and more familiar.

He was able to recall with extraordinary vividness the page of coloured illustrations; and among them the Crowned Cross of Lithkrania stood out most plainly in his memory—miraculously plainly; so that he saw the heavy silver cross, quite plain in its design, with polished, smooth finish, and, at its middle, the little golden crown. So vivid was this, in fact, that he almost seemed to feel, in his hand, the weight of that silver cross . . .

The sergeant spoke at last—in Lithkranian. Billy shook his head. The hard grey eyes continued to bore into his face. Fritz said: "He wants to know your name."

"Tell him," said Billy.

But on this the sergeant spoke in English. "I speak English," he said, with the precise accent of a man who has studied the language from books. "What is your name?" He seemed about to add something else—another word . . . but checked himself.

"Billy Trent," said Billy, quietly.

"Trent." The eyes gleamed slightly. "That is a river in England, eh?" He paused, as though he thought hard. "A place called Nottingham. I've been there."

Billy nodded. He could not understand this at all.

"So." The sergeant rasped a quick order. The soldiers surrounded Fritz and Billy in businesslike fashion and another curt order set two files of them marching, Billy and Fritz in the middle. The sergeant spoke to a man with a couple of stars on his arm, and leaving him in charge of the remainder of the posse, set off with the escort and prisoners.

Now and again the sergeant stroked his chin and looked hard at Billy, and Billy wondered why he still should be so sure of the weight of that plain silver cross, why he should have remembered it so vividly from among all the other coloured decorations on his page of military honours.

They came to a police station. It was thick with infantrymen. They were lounging about, their rifles piled in the floor middle, gambling, smoking, talking. A young fair-haired officer came into the room, the sergeant barked a command, and all the men jumped to attention. The officer snapped a word or two and they resumed their talking. The sergeant addressed the officer, who glanced at the prisoners indolently and without interest.

Fritz whispered: "He's telling the sergeant to talk to you. He knows no English himself."

The officer snarled at him, and Fritz stiffened, heels clicked together. The prisoners were not allowed to talk. More orders, more soldiers moving. The sudden clatter of a motor-bike outside. A man came in, saluted stiffly and handed the officer an envelope. The officer's face darkened as he read its contents. He dismissed the motor-cycle rider with a tossed word. The man took a pace back, saluted, stamped out. They heard his bike thud away. All curt and quick and machine like . . . and—Billy sensed it—a hint of danger in the air, fresh danger.

Fritz was put into a cell with Billy, and the sergeant stayed with them. It was to Billy that he spoke.

"Nobody here," he said, "understands English except you and me and this man." The sergeant looked Billy over. "I want you to tell me if you remember the town of Nottingham, in England."

"I was born there," said Billy. "At least, I believe I was. My aunt brought me up until she died. Her name was Lessiter. Miss Ann Lessiter. But why do you ask?"

The sergeant, however, was on his feet. His right hand moved . . . and then fell to his side.

He said: "You will do all I tell you to do. Your life depends on it. And not one word of Miss Lester shall you say to anybody in this country. Not one word . . . if you wish to live. Do you understand?"

"I'm trying to," said Billy.

"But . . ."

"There are no buts," said the sergeant brusquely. "And now one more question. Have you ever met an Englishman who calls himself Mr. Brame Sentence?"

"Why, yes," said Billy, excitedly.

"He employed me. He found me . . ."

"It's enough." The sergeant took a deep, long breath. "You will wait. Remember my name. I am Sergeant Ernst Zweger of the 15th Rifles."

He stumped out, leaving Billy in a state of utter bewilderment. Trent . . . Nottingham . . . his aunt, whose name had seemed so familiar to the sergeant. . . . Suddenly he wondered, with a vague fear, whether his name were not Trent after all; whether the proximity of the great river, during his life at Nottingham, had not suggested a name to whoever called him Trent.

He was wondering this when a spasmodic burst of rifle fire broke the quiet of the cell. The police station was being attacked.

The Riverside House.

SERGEANT ZWEGER came back to the cell in a few minutes. He looked worried.

"You will come out of here," he said.

"We are attacked and unlikely to beat the attack off. Keep close to me—both of you.

This was an unusual procedure, but it merely measured up with the sergeant's unusual behaviour. They went with him, and they saw everything.

The street outside the police station was filled with a milling mob, many of whom possessed rifles. These riflemen were keeping up a constant fire on the station, and the bullets were smashing and shrieking through broken windows, singing of death.

The fair-haired officer was sitting in a corner. He looked very white and stupid, and he had a handkerchief pressed to his chest. Red was welling through the handkerchief and running over his fingers.

Three soldiers were dead and four others were wounded. The sergeant was in charge, and that accounted for his freedom with his prisoners.

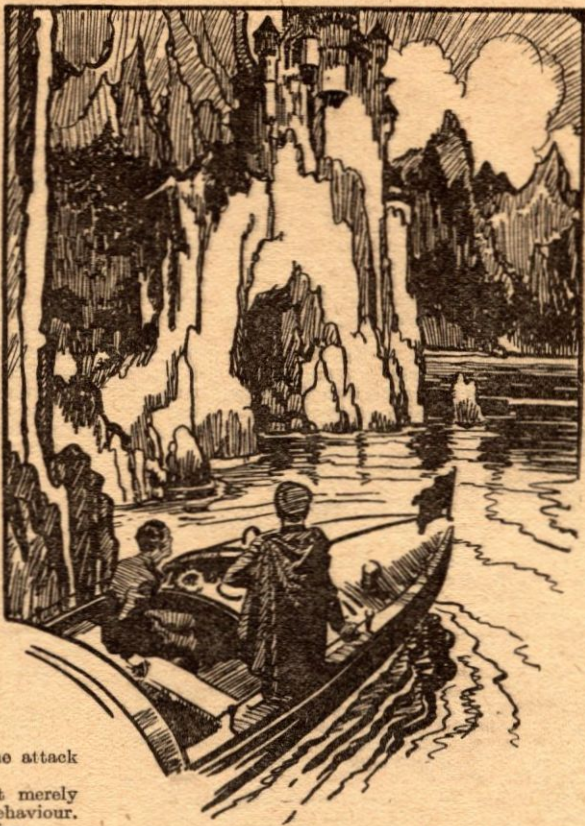
The sergeant said to Billy: "We have to get out of here—you and I. Your friend, I suppose, must come with us. But we have to get away. Can you see the street?"

Across an angle, and thus out through a window, Billy could see the street and the mob that filled it. There were men among the civilians of a kind he had not seen in the previous street fighting. They wore blue uniforms with wide-legged trousers, and flapping collars, little blue hats with yellow bobbles.

"Sailors!" he gasped.

Sergeant Zweger nodded grimly. "Yes, the gunboat's crew has mutinied. That means they won't be alone. The Navy has gone over to the insurgents, and all successful revolutions start in navies. Come along."

They ducked with him through the rear of the station, and as they went they heard a wild yell,



THE CASTLE OF MYSTERY.—Stahfeld Schloss was perched on a great rock, lifting clean out of the water. Above it reared snow-capped mountains clothed with dark firs.

the thunder of blows on a door. The crowd had rushed the station.

Billy knew that for a man like Sergeant Zweger to desert his post and his men something important must be afoot. They slipped out through a rear door and Zweger began to run. They kept up with him, though they were very tired.

"We want the river," he panted, "and a fast boat. I want to reach a certain spot upstream near the Stahfeld Schloss. Hear that?"

There was the boom of a big gun, an explosion far off. Zweger said grimly: "The gunboat's shelling the barracks. This is the end, in Stahfeld, at any rate."

He led them by twisting ways, through alleys where dead men lay, and brought them at last to a quay. Below it was a big motor-boat, and a man was sitting in its stern.

Zweger's long military pistol was flourished. The man took one look at it and bolted. They dropped into the boat.

Now grey dawn flooded the city, and against its greyness they saw the flares of various fires. The

river also was clear to them, stretching through the city to left and right of them, bridges ahead and astern.

The gunboat had been joined by a destroyer, and both these vessels were loosing shells wildly.

"If anything happens and we get separated, try and find your way to the Riverside House," Zweger said. "It is below the Castle of Stahnfeld. Say that Sergeant Ernst Zweger sent you and that you are his friends. Then wait for something to turn up."

He started the boat and it thudded out to mid-river, swinging upstream as he turned its tiller over. The destroyer was nearer to them than the gunboat and as their craft started forward somebody on the warship must have seen them. A quickfirer began to speak, and small shells crashed and ricocheted all round them, flinging great volumes of water inboard.

Zweger gave their engine its full throttle. The boat's prow lifted and its stern dropped. It began to tear away up the river, with the shells following it.

Ahead, a long wide bridge loomed. Once they were through the bridge they could not easily be hit, for the bridge would hide them.

A deeper, heavier boom sounded. A big gun was coming into action. A light shell touched water only a yard away. Their boat heeled like a living thing stricken hard, resumed an even keel and ploughed on its way.

The big gun crashed again, and at the same time they ran under the wide span of the great bridge. The shell from the gun took the bridge clean in the middle!

To Billy it was as though the end of the world had come. Above him thunder and flame leapt mightily skywards and riverwards. Twisted steel and smashed roadway flow in all directions. Their boat simply went under them as though a giant had stooped and pushed it below the surface.

Billy went under water, fighting for his life, striking out blindly, with the tide rush carrying him on.

He came to the surface some distance from the bridge. By the biggest stroke of luck in the world the tide was running upstream, and it had carried him in the same direction as the motor-boat had travelled; so that now the wrecked bridge was between him and the madmen who were firing from the warships.

Of Fritz and Sergeant Ernst Zweger there was no sign at all, and Billy, keeping himself afloat, allowing the current to carry him on until he had recovered his wits and breath, felt a lump rise in his throat.

Suppose Fritz were dead—after all the great adventures they had had together! Good old Fritz, with his slow grin, his ponderous manner, his quick loyalty. . . .

Another bridge. Billy shot beneath it, and decided now to make land. He had reached the outskirts of Stahnfeld, and he calculated that he could do nothing better than get ashore to safety. Besides, the water was oiterly cold and his hands were beginning to feel numb.

He struck across current. It was a hard and desperate swim. Time and again he had to rest and float, while the tide carried him on until he was beyond Stahnfeld.

At last his feet touched bottom and, dragging himself very wearily, he began to walk ashore. He had got so far to land that he was only ankle deep in the tide run, when he heard a noise offshore, and a light suddenly flicked into being and swept him and trees that crowded down to the water's edge.

He flung himself face down, dragging his body up the coarse grass that edged the thin strip of sand, and, doing so, he heard a hail.

A patrol boat had picked him out. He guessed that it was one of the boats he and Fritz had seen when they were hiding in the old hulk—a Government boat, driven from the Stahnfeld area by the sudden disaffection of the warships, but still ranging the upper reaches of the river.

The boat's searchlight flung this way and that. He heard another hail, and he began to crawl towards the trees. He had now only one idea in his head, and that was to find the Riverside House.

The light picked him up again. A rifle cracked and a bullet went unpleasantly close to him. He took a terrific risk. He got to his feet and he started to run.

The rifle cracked again. Something touched his right shoe heel, as though a stick had beaten at it. He lurched and fell down. The light was more powerful, and he guessed the boat was running inshore. He scrambled up and looked back, his face clearly shown by the white light.

He heard a yell, and he turned and blundered into the thickness of the trees. There utter darkness still rested, for the very faint dawnlight could not yet penetrate them.

Hunted.

ON went Billy through the trees—a blind rush that took him through bracken and bush, which cracked and broke, advertising his passage to his pursuers.

He had not the wit to seek safety and a hiding-place in the darkness afforded by the forest. His overtaxed body still drove on. The Riverside House. That was what he wanted. The Riverside House. Where . . . how . . . when . . . he did not know.

He did not even hear the shouts of those behind him, the hoarse demands that he should stop and surrender. He heard nothing at all save the thunder that flooded his brain and numbed it.

Suddenly, as he ran, the ground seemed to fall right away from before him. He went lurching downwards, his arms flung wide, his hands clutching desperately at anything and everything. He had fallen into an old cutting, from which sand had been dug many years earlier for building purposes. It had long since been abandoned, and was now overgrown with bush and thorn.

This bush growth saved him from injury. He would not have been killed by the fall, for the pit was not deep, but he might easily have sustained a broken limb.

As it was, he merely cannoned off various sturdy bushes which checked and broke his fall, and so at last he rolled in a dazed and breathless heap to the bottom of the pit and lay there.

After a second or two he heard voices. His pursuers had lost the sound of his movement, and in the darkness they were bewildered as to where he might be. An electric torch flashed amid the trees above the pit's edge, but it was a feeble light in such a mass of blackness.

Billy crawled into the deeper shelter of the thick bushes, and lay quiet. He just wanted to lie in those bushes for days and days and sleep and sleep.

His run had heated his blood and for the time being he felt no cold from his drenched clothing; though the danger of that wetting was now present in his mind.

The men were searching for him far and wide round the pit. There were, he gathered, four of them, from the way they called to one another. One of them had descended into the pit. He was the fellow with the torch, and he was flicking its thin ray round about him as he trod carefully in all directions.

But his task was hopeless. The pit was an immense place in which, even in broad daylight, a hidden

man would take some finding. In that dawn twilight and with only an electric torch as an illuminant, the task was hopeless unless monumental luck assisted the searcher.

The heat was now going from Billy's body and he was beginning to feel cold. When he thought that he was going to be thoroughly chilled through, his hunters began to move off. He heard them crackle away through the bushes, and, dragging on his last ounce of strength, he got up, crossed the pit and managed to scramble up its far side.

He could see the gleam of the broad river through the trees and he kept it in view, padding along at a fair pace, and so once more warming himself.

In fact, as he ran, his clothes began to dry in the wind. His jog trot was maintained only to combat the threatened cold, when his every instinct was to flop down and surrender to a tiredness which had become agonising.

How far he had gone he did not know. But at last he saw some lights ahead of him. They were the lights of a house standing on the very edge of the water—a riverside house . . . perhaps The Riverside House! He stumbled towards them. He might be walking into the hands of his enemies; but now he could hold out no longer. Lights meant warmth, comfort, food, shelter.

He could distinguish the house as he drew near to it. It was a fairly large place built of stone instead of timber, and it had a wooden quay at its front. Against this quay two or three boats were moored, one of them a motor-boat.

The significance of this was lost to Billy. It did not enter his head that there might be a river headquarters of the police who patrolled the stream. He could only think of The Riverside House—as though that might be the only house on the banks of that great waterway.

He went in through an iron gate in a fence to a door and he hammered on it.

The sounds of voices within ceased as he did so, and the door was suddenly pulled open. Billy lurched forward. He saw men in uniform—the *kepis* of the Lithkranian police, a uniform slightly different from the uniform of the land police; and he knew his mistake.

He tried to turn, but a great hand dropped on his shoulder. He heard an excited shout, and he was urged forward. With this, he fell to his face and forgot everything.

To Stahnfeld Schloss.

HE awoke to warmth. He had been unconscious, he gathered, not a great time; for he found himself swathed in a rough police blanket and sitting in a big chair by a mighty fire. His clothing

was spread out before the blaze, steaming slowly—nearly dry.

The warmth had spurred his failed faculties, so that he was able to think fairly clearly. A man put a big basin of soup in front of him and he tackled it greedily. They were very kind, he thought.

The soup completed what the warmth had begun, and though he felt in need of countless hours of sleep, his utter exhaustion was banished, leaving him merely tired.

He realised that the policemen did not view him as a foe. To them he was somebody who had fallen



THE BRIDGE BOMBARDED.—Billy and Fritz had reached the bridge when a shell hit it. Twisted steel and smashed roadway flew in all directions, and the boat heeled over.

into the river and, having scrambled ashore, had come to their station for assistance.

The tremendous fire had made short work of the wetness in his clothes, and by the time he had drunk the soup they were quite fit for him to put on. He did so.

One of the policemen began to question him. Billy did not understand a word the man said, and replied in English: "I speak English. Does anybody here know it?"

They muttered among themselves, and they shook their heads. Again they addressed him, indicating

the river. He knew they were asking him what had happened.

He could only shake his head and spread his hands. So they abandoned talking and he began to doze in his chair. It was delicious to slide into a long, deep sleep.

A stranger had come to the police station. He stood over Billy and shook him and woke him. Through the haze of his first waking Billy gradually recognised him, and knew all his old fears.

For this was one of the men who had travelled with him and the Englishman in the car, southwards, from Germany!

THE man had recognised him beyond all doubt; and he spoke English into the bargain.

"How did you get here?" he demanded. How he should be there, Billy did not know; but he guessed that he had come from Stahnfeld Castle, on a message from the police that they held a mysterious boy who had scrambled to their station from the river.

Billy stammered, still half asleep: "I was in the river, and I got out." It was a foolish statement; but all he could think of in his dazed condition.

"So. A very clever story." Thin lips smiled sardonically. "I think you had better come with me."

He hauled Billy to his feet, and the movement woke the boy fully. Short though his sleep had been it had refreshed him considerably, and he felt almost himself as he was marched to the door.

Against the wooden quay a big, grey boat lay, rolling slightly on the tide. The Lithkranian national flag stood on a short steel staff at her prow, and her turtle deck gleamed dully in the sunshine. A man sat astern at her steering wheel and another crouched amidships with a rifle across his knees.

Billy's escort took him to the boat and told him

EDITOR'S NEWS

(Continued from page 15.)

Falcon Swift, too—in a powerful long complete detective tale by our Secret Service man author. One of the greatest cases the Sporting Sleuth ever tackles was that desperate bid to recapture

Sky Shark's Loot.

Sky Shark is a monster airship which a band of crooks, commanded by one Merritt Shanson, use to rob the world of its wealth. Before he brings the plotters to justice Falcon Swift and Chick Conway voyage aboard the giant airship on its last flight. And their breathless adventures on the doomed dirigible will grip you as no flying and detective yarn has done before.

Add to these attractions the first of a great new series of Dandy Cowboy tales, introducing RED MASK OF THE RIO GRANDE; another flashing exploit of Bulldog Hamilton; further chapters of THE MASTER OF MASKS, and a laughable, fun-filled yarn featuring WASHINGTON HAYSEED, our comical Darkie Sleuth, and it will give you a dim idea of the splendid treat in store for you next week.

Your sincere friend, THE EDITOR.

Boys! Look! ask your shop

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to get into it. Its engine started with a roar, and as a gear dropped home it spurned the water astern, swung the river in a wide circle, and sped upstream.

The last of the police house that Billy saw were the uniforms of its kindly inmates gathered on the quay watching him go. He never forgot those men who had saved his life and had been so good to him.

The boat was a fine, powerful thing, and it made short work of its voyage; so that at last Billy saw that place which he and Fritz had sought so long.

The great Schloss of Stahnfeld was perched, like a white eagle, on a mighty crag that lifted clean out of the river. Behind it, rising higher towards the snowline, black firs massed like a dark army. Above them the mountains rose in austere beauty towards the sun-filled sky. The whole presented a picture at once beautiful and sinister, attractive yet repellent; as though the castle were a bird of prey, hunched above the river, watching and waiting for victims.

Battlement and tower, archer's slit and portcullis entry... it was a perfect specimen of the architecture of its kind.

The boat ran into a deep cavern in the rock face. This cavern was lit by electric lamps, and at one side of it, where the tide lapped idly, was a rock landing stage, to which the boat was hitched.

Billy's escort got him out of the craft and took him through an iron gate let into the face of the cavern wall. They began to ascend steep steps, climbing through the very heart of the rock, which at last brought them to a narrow passageway between rock chambers—the underground dungeons of the place.

Billy had come to Stahnfeld Castle as a prisoner. He was in the hands of One Over Seven.

What strange secrets does the Castle hold? What will be the end of the great Mystery? Gripping developments in next week's thrilling episodes. Detective Outfits for the Amateur Sleuth FREE next week.

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AN EXPERT CHAT ON WEMBLEY

Cup Final Kick-offs!

Rain, Wind Storm and Sweltering Heat! Cup Gladiators have Played Under All Conditions in the Fight for the Most Coveted Trophy of the Green Arena. Some Historic Finals and This Year's Finalists Described Below, Boys.

MORE than one hundred thousand people will throng Wembley on Saturday to see the Everton and Manchester City teams battling for the F.A. Cup—more often called the English Cup. And there are many more thousands who would like to see Saturday's great all-Lancashire Final.

Contrast this enthusiasm with that of little more than sixty years ago, the year the Cup competition was introduced.

On July 20th, 1871, some members of the Football Association got together and devised the Cup tournament, with a view to fostering football enthusiasm. Only fifteen clubs entered and they rather unwillingly subscribed to the first Cup—which cost about £25! Less than a thousand people saw the first Cup-final!

Though the Cup is usually known as the English Cup, Scottish and Irish clubs were allowed to enter in the early days of the Cup competition. Queen's Park, the famous Glasgow amateur side, even reached the Final on two occasions. Fortunately for English football prestige, Blackburn Rovers twice beat them in the last round.

Irish clubs never reached a late round of the competition, but Cardiff City—a Welsh club—have engraven their name on the "English Cup." They beat the Arsenal in 1927.

What stirring—and amusing—tales could be told of the early Cup-finals! No one seemed to worry much about those games, all of which were played on the cricket ground at the famous Kennington Oval.

The pitch was not marked out—nothing so elaborate! There were no goal-nets, and the crossbar was merely tape stretched between the posts!

The time came, however, when the annual Cup-final began to attract the crowds. The Oval was not big enough to hold all those who wished to see the big match of the football season. Consequently a move was made to the Midlands. The Fallowfield (Manchester) and Everton grounds were tried as the home of the Cup-final, but they proved inadequate. The F.A. decided, at length, upon the Crystal Palace as the Final ground.

Amazing things have happened at the "Glass-house." In 1910, the Barnsley team—due to play Newcastle United in the final—arrived without their players' passes—and were refused admission. What would have happened had not an F.A. official come along and recognised the players doesn't bear consideration.

Everton, this year's finalists, appeared three times at the Crystal Palace and once at Fallowfield (Manchester) in Cup-finals. Only once, however, have they carried off the coveted trophy—when they beat Newcastle United, in 1906, by 1—0.

Manchester City, Everton's Lancashire opponents on Saturday, took part in one of the most memorable of all finals. It was in 1904, when they beat Bolton



Wanderers by the only goal scored. And what a goal! It was slammed home by the great Billy Meredith, the famous Welsh international winger. To this day, Bolton consider that Billy was yards offside when he scored. But the referee thought differently—and that is all that matters!

Strangely enough, Billy Meredith returned to the Palace in a Cup-final five years later. This time he was a Manchester United star. Once again he was on the winning side—Bristol City being defeated.

In time the Crystal Palace was not large enough to accommodate the increasing Cup-final crowds, so the match was taken to Stamford Bridge.

It was here that Aston Villa beat Huddersfield Town the first year after the Great War on a sweltering afternoon. Extra time was necessary before the Villa scored the winning goal. By the end of the game the players were ready to drop like grease-spots!

The following year the 'Spurs won the "pot," but this time the match was played in a veritable cloudburst. Nevertheless, eighteen-year-old Jimmy Dimmock, now with Clapton Orient, scored the winning goal for the 'Spurs against the Wolves.

That brings us to Wembley.

Who will ever forget the first Wembley final, when nearly 200,000 people tried to see the game, smashing the gates and turnstiles in their eagerness to get into the great stadium.

Bolton Wanderers eventually triumphed over the conditions of spectators all around the touchline, and scored two goals against West Ham. David Jack, the Arsenal star, notched the very first Wembley Cup-final goal.

Three years later, still with Bolton, Dave repeated the dose, this time against Manchester City. So, you see, the City have been to Wembley before—but they have yet to win the "pot" there.

Three of their players that afternoon in 1926 will be present on Saturday—Sam Cowan and Jimmy McMullan, once more in Manchester colours. The other—Tom Johnston—will be one of the Everton stars—yes, and playing against his old pals, too!

Everything is ready for the big match of the year. It's Everton or Manchester City for the Cup! One thing is certain—Lancashire will be represented whichever wins it!

THE TALKIE THRILL HUNTERS' MOST EXCITING FILM!
At Grips With a Gorilla for the Silver Screen! Grand Complete Yarn.



What was the Mystery of Black Mask, the Killer, and Don Carroll, the Likeable Leader of the Talkie Trio?

At Sunset City.

JOE GROUSE was fed-up! Life was too tame! And if there was anything the stout little Cockney cameraman of Imperial Films Ltd. craved it was thrill's—thrills that he could record with his beloved cameras and talkie apparatus.

"What's the bloomin' use o' staying in this blinkin' country, anyway?" he groaned. "Nuthin' ever happens! And this 'ere Black Mask bloke, wot is he to us? Nuthin'!"

His two companions laughed, and Don Carroll, the leader of the Talkie Thrill Hunters, patted his stout pal's shoulder.

"Don't worry, Amiable!" he chuckled. "Something's sure to turn up. If he grumbles again, Jerry, shove your cap in his mouth."

Jerry Bevan, the youngest member of the intrepid trio, grinned. He knew that Joe was never so happy as when he was grouching.

In a thoughtful silence the thrill hunters continued on their way. They had come down from the northern timber country, intending to push on to Mexico. But tales of Black Mask had checked Daredevil Don Carroll.

Already this nocturnal killer had shot dead three of Sunset City's oldest and most influential citizens. The rest were getting scared. Who was this mysterious night-rider—Black Mask? What was the purpose of his ruthless, cold-blooded killings?

Suddenly a sound checked the three pals. It was a deep, full-throated grunt, and it came from a clump of trees to the right. It was followed by the sharp, vicious barking of dogs.

"O'mon!" Don Carroll clipped. "I don't like the sound of this!"

They hurried along in a bunch. All three came

upon the scene together, and each stopped instinctively, startled.

Before them was a bear, its hind legs held fast by two great ropes pegged into the ground. It reared up, pawing and grunting at the two lean, yellow dogs, viciously challenging its helplessness. It was the old sport of bear-baiting, staged by a tall, saturnine man with flowing moustachios.

"The cur!" gritted Don Carroll. His hands were clenched and he peered intently at the man, as if he were trying to recall some vague, distant memory.

At length, he nodded slightly to himself, as if satisfied with his quizzical stare, then stepped into the open, raising his rifle to his shoulder as he did so.

Crack! The bullet cleaved through one of the ropes holding the bear, and the strands parted with a snap. At the same moment, the man whirled, aware for the first time of the presence of the trio.

"Curse you!" he shouted, and advanced towards Don with a circus whip raised.

Don took no notice of him. Again the big fellow fired, and the second rope parted. Like the craven curs they were, the yellow dogs turned and bolted. The tormented bear lumbered after them, grunting its relief and rage.

Smiling, Don Carroll watched it go, for he loved animals. He still seemed unaware of the man charging across the clearing.

"Look out, guv'nor!" Jerry shouted.

With a start, Don turned to face the man, who was about to slash the upraised whip across the daredevil's face. For the first time, the stranger got

a proper look into Don's features. He halted, in stark surprise, his arm remained poised, his mouth gaped, while he stared incredulously.

"You!" he muttered. "Carroll!"

The big Englishman's lips twisted contemptuously. "Yes . . . Morgensen!" he said. "Pleased to make your acquaintance again. . . . Take that!"

His fist came up in a short hook. The bunched, iron-hard knuckles crashed against Morgensen's jaw. His head jerked back, and he toppled over, to measure his length on the ground, senseless.

"C'mon!" Don said, turning, his face strangely taut. "That's part settlement of an old account!"

Greatly wondering, Joe and Jerry followed their leader away from the spot, heading back to Sunset City. What strange mystery had they stumbled on? Under what strange circumstances had Don previously known Morgensen?

The big adventurer seemed deeply affected. A deep frown wrinkled his brow, his shoulders were hunched, his lips were tight shut in a thin, straight line.

Just before they entered the twisted, dusty main street of Sunset City, Don Carroll broke the tense, brooding silence that had enveloped him.

"I knew that hound years ago," he said. "He owned a circus then, but he's the sort of man who must be cruel to animals. It's his warped nature; he just can't treat 'em decently. A lion from Morgensen's menagerie killed my pal, Dick Weatherby. That skunk had plagued the beast until it was mad to kill any human being it met. My pal was unlucky enough to be its trainer!"

Don brushed his hand over his eyes. The recollection touched him deeply.

"I've not seen Morgensen since, but I vowed to settle the account that was beyond the law. And I mean to fulfil my vow!"

Black Mask.

THAT night they visited the Laughing Lass Saloon, in the hopes of learning something about Black Mask. The only information Don gleaned, however, had to do with Morgensen. It appeared that the ex-circus owner had been in the neighbourhood of Sunset City for three months. Black Mask had been busy six weeks.

Don nodded to the bar-keeper who had vouchsafed this information. He ratched for his glass of ginger-beer, but his hand never touched the vessel. For a harsh, snarling voice rasped through the hubbub.

"Hands up!"

Instantly, a tense, breathless hush descended on the company. Don was the only man to move. He whirled round, his boots scraping noisily in that expectant silence.

A gun boomed from the doorway. There came a choking, gasping sob from a bearded man sitting at a table in the corner. The old fellow slumped forward, slithered slowly to his knees, then suddenly crashed lifeless to the floor.

Don, meanwhile, was staring at the killer, standing just inside the door. He was a fearsome sight; dressed in black from head to foot. A black mask depended from his sable sombrero, completely covering his face. His dark, glittering eyes darted menacingly round the big room. Here was death on two legs—death swift and sudden.

A moment he stood there, while smoke curled lazily from his gun. Then he backed abruptly through the door, and was gone. Instantly, Don

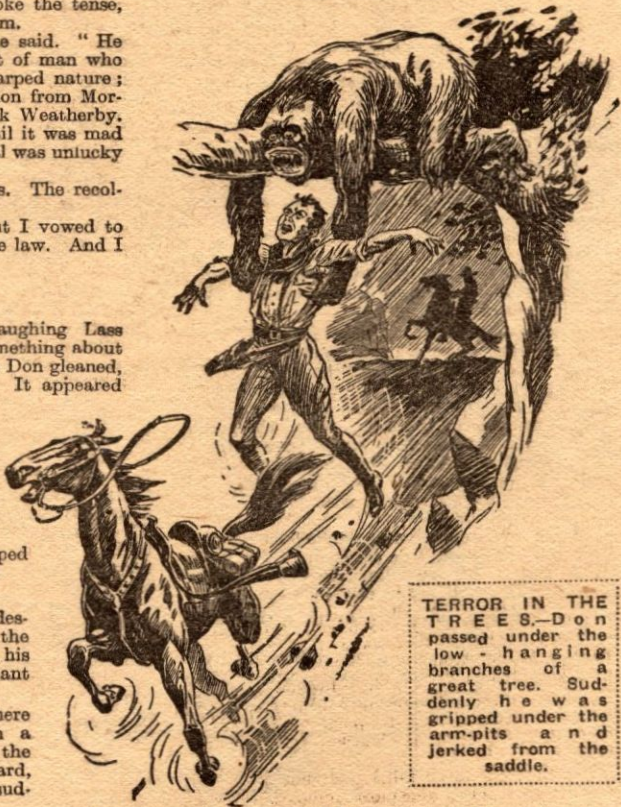
darted swiftly to the door. He saw a black shadow moving rapidly down the main street, and to his ears came the *clap-clap* of horse's hoofs.

"The skunk!" he muttered. His eyes alighted on a big brown horse tied to the hitch-rail, and he made up his mind. In a moment he had slipped the rope, leaped to the saddle, and was galloping after Black Mask.

Out into the moonlight, across the range, sped the sinister night-rider, and Don easily kept him in sight. Fiercely he urged his mount on as his quarry entered the timber belt, moving easily along a moonlit trail.

"Queer!" Don thought suddenly. "The fellow doesn't seem to be driving his horse hard. Wonder what his game is?"

Don slipped his gun from its holster as he found he was gaining rapidly. That should have warned him, but his exultation at closing on the cold-blooded killer drove all other thoughts from his mind. He levelled his gun for a chance shot.



TERROR IN THE TREES.—Don passed under the low-hanging branches of a great tree. Suddenly he was gripped under the armpits and jerked from the saddle.

At that moment he was speeding under the low-hanging branches of a giant cottonwood tree. Even as he pressed the trigger, he was gripped under the armpits. There was a jerk which threatened to break his shoulder blades, and he was dragged from the saddle. His gun was knocked from his hand, the bullet thudding harmlessly into the trees, and next moment he was dangling in mid-air!

He was hauled upwards, then hugged close in a vice-like grip. Don turned his head, and found

himself staring into red-rimmed, beady eyes set deep in an ugly, wrinkled face. The low, receding forehead and thin leathery lips curled back over great jagged teeth in a terrible snarl told Don he was in the grip of a monstrous gorilla!

Yet the big adventurer kept his head. He remained docile, knowing that any struggle on his part would only precipitate the end.

The great beast uttered strange, high-pitched cries. And all the time it hugged its prisoner closer until Don Carroll thought his ribs would crack. His head throbbed, his heart beat madly, a great mist swam before his eyes.

Dully, Don realised that the hideous monster was swinging easily to the ground. Its grip had relaxed, and the daredevil's senses cleared rapidly as the gorilla shambled across a moonlit clearing towards—Black Mask.

The killer was making loud clucking sounds in his throat, and was obviously the brute's master. There was something about Black Mask's bearing which made Don think about a circus of long ago. . . .

Next moment he was face to face with Black Mask, held forward by his hairy captor.

"So! Carroll!" the Black Mask hissed, and even as he slipped up his mask Don knew that it was Morgensen. The ex-circus owner glared with hate-filled, malevolent eyes at his helpless captive.

"I guessed you would follow. That was why I did not kill you in the saloon. I wanted full revenge for that blow this afternoon." His eyes burned with a murderous light at the recollection. "You shall pay for that tenfold. And in the end you will pray for death, as a relief from your sufferings. Zarabas!"

He was making strange noises in his throat again—speaking to his monstrous pet. Suddenly Don was lifted off his feet by the gorilla's powerful, hairy arms, swung behind it and held there back to back, despite his desperate struggles.

With a hideous burst of laughter Morgensen came forward, carrying great leather straps. "It is a long time since I had such fun," he cried. "The bear-baiting was a nursery game compared to this!"

Morgensen, his evil eyes aflame with a maniacal light, was busy passing the straps round the gorilla and its captive. At last both straps were in place and drawn tight, holding Don securely against Zarabas. Morgensen stood back to survey his handiwork, his face twisted in a leering, sardonic smile.

"No doubt you are wondering why I have adopted the part of Black Mask," he mocked. "I will tell you, for in a short time you will not be able to disclose my identity and reveal my secret."

He paused as if to collect his thoughts, then went on in fierce, terrible tones:

"Years ago, I brought my circus to Sunset City," his hands clenched at his sides as he said this. "They turned me out, their Purity League did. As though I could not treat my own animals as I wished. They disgraced me publicly. That disgrace has spread. Wherever I have gone it has been there before me. It meant the end of my circus. But Morgensen does not forget! I came back as—Black Mask—to kill those men who caused my ruin. Four of them are dead. And I will kill them all!"

He shook his fists and his lips curled back in a voiceless snarl. Then he laughed. "I thought Gordon suspected, so he had to die to-night! Now, there is you, Carroll. You will know what it means to be banged against trees, rolled upon by my gorilla. Yes, I and Zarabas will enjoy ourselves. Zarabas!"

Don's lips set tightly as the gorilla stumbled away

Morgensen's diabolical entertainment was about to begin!

A Battle of Giants.

MEANWHILE the men in the Laughing Lass remained for some moments as if robbed of all movement. Old Bill Gordon lay where he had fallen, and only Jerry and Joe stepped towards him.

Jerry turned the old man over. He was breathing with difficulty, his eyes were glazing. He gripped the legs of the tumbled table so tightly that the knuckles stood out white through the flesh. Death was coming quickly.

"Black Mask . . . I know now," he whispered, so low that Jerry and Joe had to bend close. "Pinegrove Creek. . . . He is there with that . . . that . . . Thing. . . . He is Morgensen. . . ."

And then he died, fighting to pass on what he had suspected. Jerry let his head sink gently back to the floor.

"Did you 'ear that?" Joe exclaimed. "Morgensen's Black Mask! That's wot he said!"

Jerry nodded dully. He was still a little shaken. "Come on," Joe said, brusquely. "We've got to find the gov'nor."

The thrill hunters stood up, and the movement seemed to rouse the company. They crowded round, talking excitedly, but Jerry and Joe thrust their way through the throng to the door.

At last they were outside, wondering which way to go. The problem was solved, however, by the appearance of a riderless horse, that ga oped down the main street and stood, flanks heaving, by the rail outside the saloon. Jerry saw a gun dangling, caught on a buckle of the saddle.

"That's Don's gun!" he breathed, stepping forward and seizing it. "What's it mean, Joe?"

"Blimey, I don't know!" the Cockney muttered. "Looks like somethin' happened to the gov'nor! Wot was it Bill Gordon said? Somethin' abaht Pinegrove Creek. I know where that blinkin' place is, right through the woods. Come on, it's our only chance!"

Jerry was already running, but Joe, cameraman to his fingertips, checked him.

"'Alf a mo! Wot about taking the apparatus?" he demanded.

"Right! But let's hurry!"

In a short while they were running through the trees. Neither knew fatigue. They were unaware even that their breath was coming in hoarse gasps. All Jerry wanted was to find out what had happened to Don. That, and the thought that at last there might be something worth filming, occupied Joe's thoughts, too.

Now they were under the tall trees, standing rigid and austere like sentinels. Suddenly a dark shape loomed through the trees, lumbering on ahead, grunting and wheezing.

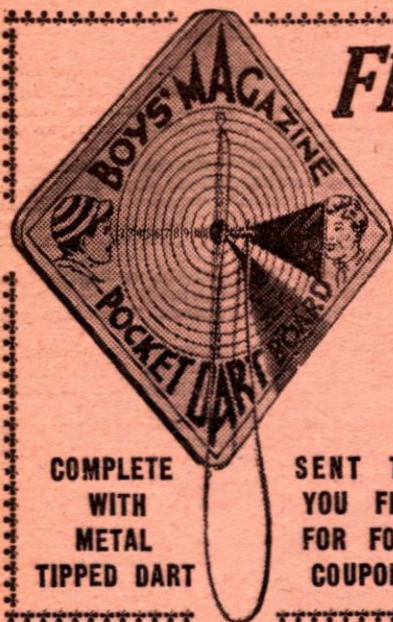
"Blimey, Jerry, it's that bear!"

The great shaggy shape plodded purposefully on in front of them. As they approached Pinegrove Creek the going became harder; craggy ground and creepers slowed them down so that they lost sight of the bear.

Suddenly there was a sound. It was like the beating of a drum. Followed a burst of fiendish laughter. An icy feeling stole up and down Jerry's spine.

"Wot's that?" Joe gasped, but, without waiting for an answer, plunged on ahead, Jerry staggering at his heels. Over a low rise, dark with close-set trees, and then suddenly into the moonlight of a clearing.

The bear was the first thing Jerry saw. It was lumbering towards Morgensen, who was laughing



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uproariously as Zarabas, with Don strapped to its back, thudded its massive chest, making a sound like the beating of a great drum. Jerry stared spellbound.

He saw the laughter die from Morgensen's face, and he reached for his gun. Then the bear was on him. Its huge paw flashed downwards like a sledgehammer at the ex-circus man's head. With a dull crashing sound Morgensen's skull caved in, from that mighty blow, and he crumpled into a lifeless heap on the grass.

There came a shrill, angry cry from the gorilla, for it had seen what had happened to its master. Its thumpings ceased, its long arms crooked out and it shambled across to the bear.

"There's going to be a fight!" Jerry gasped. "And Don..."

He could not finish. Don was tied to the back of Zarabas. The jungle giant was advancing upon the bear, that was itself lumbering forward for the combat. Jerry and Joe were helpless, for neither was armed, and could only watch this battle of giants, and hope...

"The apparatus!" Joe clipped suddenly. "Get it up! Strikes me that bear knows what the gov'nor saved it from, and is going to pay its debt."

With feverish fingers, Jerry unstrapped his pack, rigged up the sound recorder and set it working. Joe had got his camera fixed by then and the brilliant moon was light enough for filming. It would be a talkie to grip the world.

The two terrible combatants were circling. Suddenly, Zarabas leapt, lips snarling back, long arms whirling like flails, trying to tear at Bruin's throat.

The bear reared, a giant forepaw flashed out and struck the flat, snarling head aslant. The gorilla toppled sideways, and only saved himself by dropping on all fours, dodging quickly as the bear came on, intent on getting to grips. Miraculously, Zarabas slipped under Bruin's arms.

Next moment the gorilla had leapt to the bear's back. Its short, powerful fingers were clawing at the thick, brown coat, ripping, tearing. Fiendish screams

and grunts rent the air, all being stored up by the sound apparatus Jerry was winding.

The most natural thing for Bruin to have done was to roll over. But that would have crushed Don Carroll, and it was as if the bear knew. It wriggled, a brown paw went back over one shoulder, terrible razor-edged claws hooked and gripped the gorilla's short, thick neck and plucked Zarabas from his hold.

It was the beginning of the end. Zarabas clawed like a mad thing at head, throat and flanks, but Bruin had it secure. Suddenly the bear lifted a massive paw, then brought it down with terrible, sickening force on Zarabas' head. Twice more that fearful paw rose and fell on the gorilla's skull. Nothing could have withstood those terrible blows. Zarabas' head was battered to a horrid, pulpy mass...

Bruin dropped the dead gorilla to the ground, face downward, so that Don was on top, uninjured. Then it shambled away through the trees. Its work done!

"Blimey, wot a picture!" Joe Grouse breathed. Then he dashed forward and tore feverishly at the straps fastening Don to Zarabas. The leader of the thrill hunters grinned weakly at his little cameraman.

"Did you film it?" he asked, and Joe nodded. "Good!" And Don Carroll fell back unconscious after his terrible ordeal.

Get ready to welcome an old bunch of thrill favourites, chaps. The Flying Circus returns next week in a thrilling new Serial better and more enthralling than the last.

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THE HAUNTED ISLAND

(Continued from page 25.)

from another direction. These men from the schooner had not seen Fat and Pip, for their whole attention was devoted to the boat being lowered from the *Haddock*.

"Keep out a' sight, you guys," the leader said. "They're comin' ashore now. Where's Ed?"

"Here, boss," said a luminous skeleton, tripping lightly forward.

The skeleton was, of course, one of the schooner's crew, dressed in a tight-fitting black suit with the skeleton bones painted on it. But when he stood against a dark background it was impossible to tell this.

"We're going right away now to get the goods," went on the schooner captain. "As soon as you've scared 'em off, come to us an' report, see."

"Okay, boss."

The master of the schooner beckoned to his men and they followed him towards the palm-grove in the immediate track of Fat and Pip. The skeleton concealed himself in the undergrowth and waited.

Meanwhile the ghostly castaway and the cabin boy of the *Haddock* lay in hushed concealment not ten yards from the spot where the treasure was supposed to be buried.

"They're comin'," whispered Pip, as sounds of rustling became evident. "Get ready, Fat."

In a moment or two they heard a gruff voice.

"This is the spot, boys—accordin' to the map—between them two palms. Git busy!"

They heard the clank of picks and the crunch of shovels driving into the earth. Pip jabbed Fat in the ribs.

"Now's the time."

Fat Burns stood upright and advanced towards the group of digging men, his bony fingers outstretched.

"Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee! Fifteen men on a dead man's chest!"

"Sakes-alive! What is it!"

"Get ye gone, ye livin' scum!" croaked Fat Burns in the weirdest voice he could muster. "I am the guardian spirit of yonder treasure. Tainted with my life blood it is! Touch it an' thy hands shall rot with leprosy, thine eyes shall drop out and thy blood curdle! Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee!"

That was enough! A sudden panic seized the schooner captain and his men. Dropping their tools and shrieking with terror, they dived in all directions. In half-a-second the palm-grove was occupied solely by the broadly grinning spirit of the castaway. Pip emerged from his hiding-place, smiling with triumph.

"What did I tell you? I knew we could scare 'em away."

Meanwhile, on the shore of the island, Claude Prune and Cap'n Keelson had landed, and Slim and Dutchy, who had rowed them out, were busy drawing up the boat out of reach of the breakers. Claude gazed askance at the thick labyrinth-like undergrowth beyond the sand.

"I don't fancy walking through that beastly stuff, captain," he said. "I'll walk along an' see if I can find an' opening somewhere."

"Aye, aye, sir. Think me an' the boys'll take the direct route. Meet you underneath the palms—you know the spot."

"Righty oh, captain! Toodle-pip!"

Claude veered away from the objectionable undergrowth and moved along the sands, while Cap'n

Keelson, Dutchy and Slim plunged boldly through the undergrowth.

But they did not get far.

Suddenly a terrible shape loomed up before them, emitting moans calculated to freeze the blood. A glowing skeleton it was, its bony arms waving terrifyingly above its head.

"(ooooooooooooo! I am the remains of Bloodstained Basil, murdered these hundred years by Death's-Head Higginbotham, the pirate! (ooooooooooooo! I haunt this island for ever guarding the tainted treasure! Death to all humans who dare to touch it! (ooooooooooooo!)"

"St-st-ap me!" gurgled the cap'n, his hair standing on end. "A skelington!"

"Go!" screamed the phantom. "Go while you are still safe!"

They went. Never has a heavy boat been launched so quickly. They tumbled in head first, and two seconds later they were pulling like mad back to the *Happy Haddock*.

The skeleton chuckled to himself in silence as he watched them go. At last he turned inland to rejoin his boss as arranged, and eventually he came to the palm-grove and stepped boldly forward.

He nearly leapt clean out of his tight-fitting suit at the sight before him. There stood the ghostly image of the ancient mariner of legend!

But Fat Burns found himself in an exactly similar state of spellbound horror at that eerie vision of a skeleton, standing before him. Pip, too!

Simultaneously, the two ghosts let out a wild yell of fear, turned tail and fled in opposite directions.

Fat and Pip reached their boat, and launched it in record time, and commenced to pull away from the shore as if pursued by fiends.

On the other side of the island a terrified skeleton had plunged into the sea, and was swimming with every ounce of his strength towards the schooner. The crew of scared sailors, however, were faltering over themselves in their haste to get the ship under sail and away from the haunted island.

But the *Happy Haddock* remained at anchor. For what had happened to Claude Prune? They could not desert him. All night long they kept a watch on the shores of the island. As dawn streaked across the eastern horizon they heard a hail.

"I say! Ship Ahoy! Ship—a jolly—old—ho-y! Can't you send me a boat, you chumps. I've been waitin' heah all night!"

After some trouble the skipper managed to get a boat launched and Fat, Slim and Pip rowed ashore.

"Jump in!" said Fat, looking round uneasily as the boat beached.

"All right," replied Claude Prude. "Some of you get out and give me a hand with the treashah!"

"The what!!!" roared three voices in chorus.

"The treasure, of course, I found it last night. When I left Cap'n Keelson I stumbled into a big hole on the other side of the island. There was a cave leading out of the hole and in the cave I found this!"

For the first time they noticed Claude was sitting on an ancient, mildewed box. He got up and lifted the lid. It was crammed full of jewels and gems and ancient Spanish dollars.

Slim and Fat fell limply into each others arms.

Washington Hayseed, our comical coon sleuth, in another amusing case next week. Order your copy of the *MAG.* early next week and make sure of one of our Amateur Detective Outfits.