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Boys' 2D Magazine

EVERY SATURDAY

AMATEUR DETECTIVE
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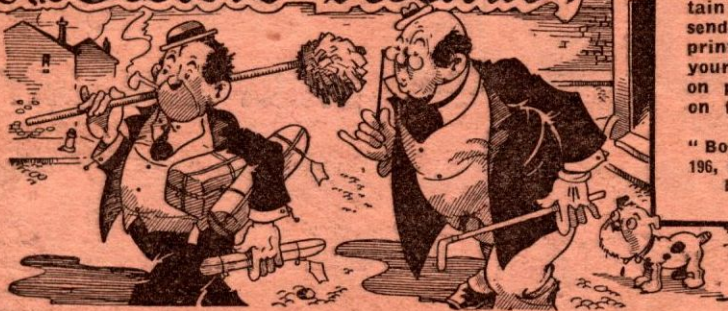
GRAND DETECTIVE NUMBER : CRAMMED WITH THRILLS

VOL. XXII—No. 584—May 13, 1933

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Send YOUR best joke for this page.

The Jester's Realm



Cricket Bats 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.

Keen But Short-sighted Horticulturist: What a gorgeous chrysanthemum!
(Cricket Bat to BEARNARD MORROLL, 13½, Windmill Street, Walsall, Staffs.)

IT WAS NECESSARY.

TEACHER: Why are you late, Tommy?
TOMMY: Father wanted me at home.
TEACHER: Wouldn't someone else have done?
TOMMY: No, teacher; Dad was giving me a spanking.
(Fountain pen to FRANK FOSTER, 297, Derby Street, Bolton, Lancs.)

TROUBLESOME.

JONES: Ever troubled with dyspepsia?
SMITH: Only when I tried to spell it.
(Fountain pen to A. MARSON, 2, Free Trade Cottages, Warsop, Notts.)

FRUITLESS.

JOHN: Tommy, what do the niggers do in Africa if one of them dies?
TOMMY: Oh, they go black-burying (berrying).
(Fountain pen to FRED DUNSTER, 12, Nealdon St., Stockwell, S.W.9.)

THE CAUSE.

TEACHER: Sam, why are your hands dirty?
SAM: Please, sir, I have been having black puddings for dinner!
(Fountain pen to JOHN CLARKSON, 43, Clifton St., Blackburn, Lancs.)

STRIKING.

A man was charged with loitering and the judge was questioning him "What's your occupation?" asked his worship.
"Well, me lord," replied the prisoner, "I'm a timber merchant in a small way."
"What do you mean?" asked the puzzled magistrate.
"I sell matches at a street corner."
(Fountain pen to W. ARCHIBALD, 69, Lochlea Road, Glasgow.)

DISCONCERTING.

POLICEMAN: Have you permission to play here?
STREET MUSICIAN: No, sare.
POLICEMAN: Then you'll have to accompany me.
STREET MUSICIAN (with alacrity): Wiz mooch pleshure. Now wat you sing?
(Fountain pen to W. MALBERT, Magdalen Laven, Ongar, Essex.)

POSITIVELY.

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER: Have my films developed all right?
PHOTOGRAPHER: The answer is in the negative!
(Fountain pen to RALPH ANDREWS, 31, Silverdale Rd., Bushey, Watford, Herts.)

WHERE!

HEADMASTER: So you were born in Glasgow?
JOCK: Yes, sir!
HEADMASTER: What part?
JOCK: Oh, all of me, sir.
(Fountain pen to HAROLD SANDS, Holmsted Farm, Haywards Heath, Sussex.)

SICKENING.

BOY: A box of pills, please.
CHEMIST'S ASSISTANT: Antibilious?
BOY: No, it's my uncle this time.
(Fountain pen to T. MILNER, 6, But-terton Road, Rhyl, Flints.)

BED TIME.

It was Willie's first holiday in the country. In a farmyard one evening he saw the farmer's wife plucking a fowl. For a few moments he watched in amazement. Then he asked:
"I say, ma'am, do you undress 'em every night?"
(Fountain pen to A. BUTTERWORTH, 1, Meldon Road, Birchfields, Manchester.)



Tight-Rope Walker
(carrying his assistant):
Crikey, 'Arry, I've got hiccups coming on!
(Cricket Bat to KENNETH YOUNG, 51, Aveling Park Road, Walthamstow, E.17.)

(With which is incorporated "Pals.")

BUCCANEERS OF THE CLOUDS! The Monocled Manhunter and Chick Fight the Menace of the Sky Monster. GRIPPING SLEUTH TALE!

SKY SHARK'S LOOT

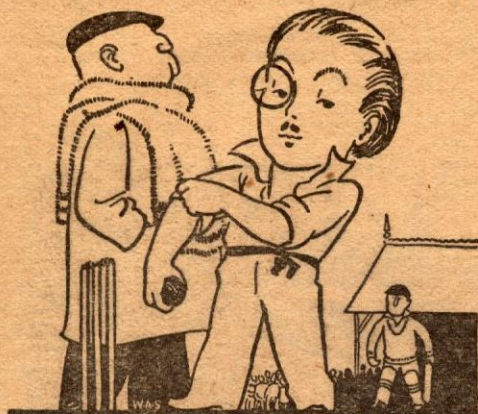
The Empress of the Air.

FALCON SWIFT declutched, threw out the gear and gently applying the footbrake, brought the great Hispano-Suiza to a standstill, its engine throbbing evenly; while Swift and Chick Conway stared across the intervening Sussex fields to where the airship was moored.

She made a marvellous sight in the morning sunshine, as she nosed and dipped at her mooring mast, with the bright waters of the Channel showing beyond her.

While they looked at her Falcon Swift expounded. "She cost about eight hundred thousand pounds originally," he said. "She's seven hundred feet long—nearly the biggest airship ever built. Her engines—ten of them—develop 5,000 horse-power. She can lift from the ground at over two thousand feet a minute, which is some going. And she belongs to





When they want a run to win
And the last man's coming in,
Says the Bowler.....

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

Mr. Merritt Shanson, of Shanson Court, which is the grey, stone house you can see near by. She can carry up to about eighty or ninety people, but her crew is actually much smaller than that, of course."

"My hat," said Chick. "He must have some money. It costs a bit to sail a ship like that."

Falcon Swift's lazy eyes scanned the airship casually. "Ye-es," he said softly. "I suppose it does . . . for pleasure. Why, here is Mr. Merritt Shanson himself," he added.

A man had walked towards them. He was a tall and elegant fellow in white flannel trousers and a double-breasted blue coat with brass buttons. He wore no hat.

"Hello," he said. "Mr. Falcon Swift, isn't it?"

"Yes. Mr. Merritt Shanson, I believe." Chick had the sure feeling that this was not a meeting, but an encounter.

Shanson lounged nearer. "You've been hanging about my place a good deal lately, Swift," he said. "I don't like people who are not my . . . friends . . . being near me. Will you take that as a warning?"

Chick looked at the man's handsome, ruthless face and saw latent threat smouldering in his eyes. Swift dropped home a gear and chuckled. "Of what?" he asked.

"Just what you care to think," snapped Shanson; and Chick, almost gasping, read death in his eyes.

The car began to move. Falcon Swift made no further reply, and said nothing at all to Chick as they went on their way.

They came out near Steyning and dawdled towards the London road junction at Washington.

To their left Chanctonbury reared, steep and unswatched; and down the slopes of Chanctonbury a man ran for his life.

Neither Falcon Swift nor Chick observed him at first. Then to their ears came the unmistakable sound of a rifle shot.

The running man skidded sideways, recovered, came tearing on. The Sporting Sleuth brought the car to a standstill and slithered over her side to the road, Chick with him.

"Ware that rifle," hissed Falcon Swift.

He plunged off the road, keeping cover as much as possible. The fugitive was still running, but his pace was slower. Once more the high clear crack of the rifle rent the hot stillness of the morning.

They saw the running man shudder, stumble badly. He had been hit again. Yet still he came on. Now he was near to where Falcon Swift and Chick ran. The rifle cracked once more. The running man's arms flung sideways, he spun like a top and dropped heavily.

Falcon Swift and Chick crawled out of the bushes towards him.

Whether the rifleman was instantly afraid when he saw them, they did not then know; but he, at any rate, made a great mistake. He should have killed the detective and Chick at long range, as he had shot the running man; but he failed to do so.

The Sporting Sleuth and Chick reached the prone figure and, with difficulty, keeping flat to the ground themselves, dragged it into cover.

There Falcon Swift snapped: "Chick, watch that hill. If anybody moves this way tell me."

Chick gave half an eye to Swift's operations and the other half to the hillside, whereon nothing moved at all. Indeed, as he watched, he heard the heavy thud of a motor-bike, and he guessed that the killer was motor-cycling away.

Falcon Swift bent over the man, and as he did so a few words passed the pallid lips.

"Empress . . ." There was a choking struggle. "Plang to-night . . . Paris . . . Gems . . . Mind . . ." The lips ceased to move.

"He's dead," said Falcon Swift softly. "H'm. Foreigner, too, I should say."

He ran through the dead man's pockets carefully and decently. They disclosed a wallet containing four pounds ten, English money. Some seven odd shillings coin. A handkerchief, a penknife, a watch, a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches, a door key, and . . . something else that jingled dully.

"Look," said the Monocled Manhunter, his eyes gleaming. "There are no identification marks. No tailor's name and address on the jacket, nor on the buttons of the suit anywhere. The wallet contains no address, and no cards. But what about these?"

Chick stared. Lying on Falcon Swift's palm were seven golden coins. They were gold marks, issued by the German Government, and they were brand new.

"We'll report to the police," said Swift. "Come on." And he put the man's possessions carefully into his pocket.

On The Trail.

SUPERINTENDENT WARKLETT was one of the Big Five of Scotland Yard, and that night he sat in Falcon Swift's flat in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly, and to the famous criminologist and Chick Conway he talked of crime.

On the table lay the German gold marks taken off the dead man, and something else which Falcon Swift, in his first hurried search, had overlooked.

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

It was a little brooch of solid gold, beautifully made, stamped twenty-two carats.

"You're right, Mr. Swift," said Warklett. "We don't go much on that gigantic, organised gang stuff at the Yard. I'll admit it; but you're right about such a gang operating from London to Berlin and down to Paris and the Côte d'Azur. You've convinced us."

He paused. "A dangerous lot and clever. Jewels mostly are their stuff, as you say. But where they take it, and how they get it there, and how they sell the stuff, beats me."

"That's what I'm going to find out, Mr. Warklett," said Falcon Swift, thoughtfully polishing his monocle. "And here are my first clues." He picked up one of the marks and brooch. "Look at these. Now jewels all have settings. Clever crooks steal jewels, but are not clever enough to sell them properly, in the ordinary course of events. But this lot are different. They rip their loot to pieces. They probably sell the stones piecemeal through far-flung markets. The settings are melted down. These marks don't conform to the German Government's gold standard. Actually they have a higher gold content. I've tested them. They're coined, Mr. Warklett; but the coiners use real gold, the gold of destroyed gem settings; so that their product will pass any ordinary test. But that's dangerous. So the gang make golden ornaments and market them properly. This brooch is one."

Warklett whistled and picked up the brooch and the marks. "You're sure of this?"

"Absolutely. I've submitted these things to proper tests. If we could test every piece of jewellery in every jeweller's shop in Britain we might find an avenue of approach to the great gang. But that we can't do, so we have to try some other way. Where's the workshop? Where's the collecting and distributing organisation? They're the questions we have to answer."

Warklett took his leave soon after that, taking the gold coins and the brooch with him.

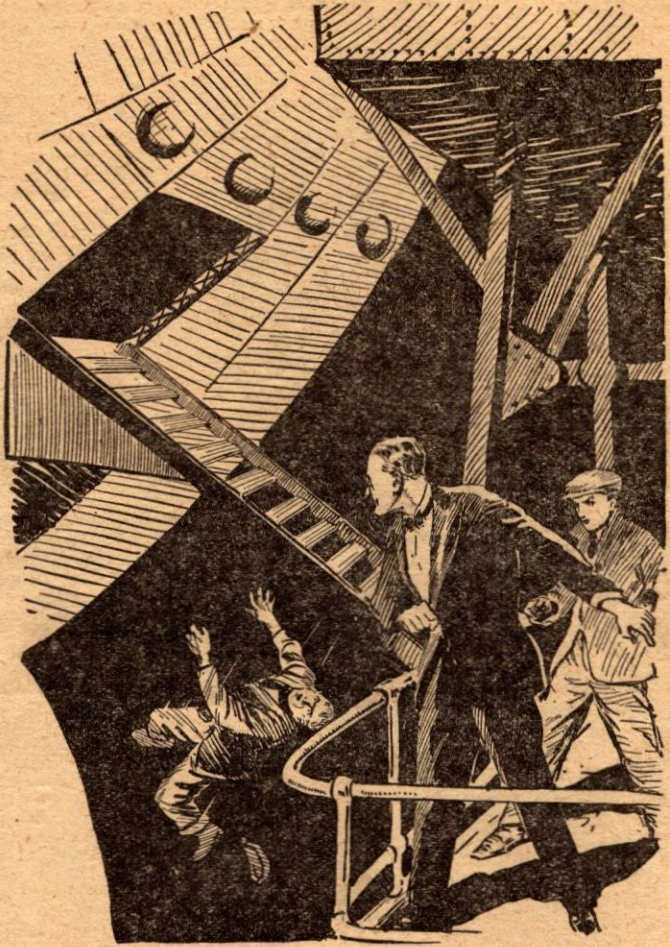
Falcon Swift went to his comprehensive newspaper cutting library, and he spent more than an hour running through its pages, while Chick watched him.

At last the Sporting Sleuth looked up. His eyes were gleaming.

"Chick," he said. "As you know, I've worked on this case at odd times over a long period, and I've collected one or two bits of information; but to-night I've hit on something very significant.

"To begin with, there is no evidence as to how Mr. Merritt Shanson got his money. To-night I've run through the records of the dates of the crimes Warklett mentioned, and I find that the *Empress of*

the Air was anchored by each town at the time of each crime. . . . Further, there was what the man said who was shot on the hillside this afternoon. If my theories are correct, another gem robbery is planned for to-night—in some way they're going to



CRASHED FROM THE CATWALK.—As the man came forward, the platform lurched. He slipped, reeled, and with a cry of fear went over the side.

hold up a jewel carrying plane from Paris. Where—how—I don't know. But of this I am certain. If they're going to do it, we shall be in it. Come on, Chick. There's no time to waste."

Ten minutes later the great grey racer was roaring southwards. The trail had been struck.

On Board.

A WAY through Leatherhead and Dorking sped the great car, running down the Worthing road to where the Steyning road branched right, and so led them, after turning off through various

leaves, to Mr. Merritt Shanson's country residence.

At Washington Falcon Swift pulled the steering wheel round, the car heeling slightly, but checking under brakes. As he did this there was an ominous snap from below and forward. The steering wheel was suddenly loose in his hands, and the monster roared forward at the far hedge.

The Sporting Sleuth had the presence of mind to jam his brakes on hard as this happened. The car's progress was steadied. She hit the far hedge, lifted, rolled over, and by a miracle Falcon Swift and Chick were thrown clean on to the hedgetop. After lying there for a second or two, they scrambled down breathless and partly stunned.

Falcon Swift took a big electric torch from his pocket and examined the machine; then whistled softly and pointed to its exposed underframe. The track rod of the steering had been sawn nearly through.

"Somebody knows," said the famous sleuth, quietly. "Well, that makes it all the more interesting. There's a garage up the road, Chick. Run there and get help. And we want a car, too."

Chick came back a few minutes later with the garage man. He inspected the wreck and said he would get it pulled into his place. He had a hire car, and his son would drive them where they wished. A little later Swift and Chick were on their way.

The car dropped them near to Merritt Shanson's place, and Chick and Falcon Swift started their great tour of inspection.

The Shanson house stood in about fifty acres of park and grazing land, dotted here and there with trees. Some distance from it was the enormous hangar which Shanson had built for the housing of his ship.

The *Empress of the Air* however, was not in the hangar. She was still moored to the great, tapering, steel mast. They could see her black against the night sky, a long and menacing shadow, that rolled slightly as the wind brushed it.

"What about the ship first?" whispered Falcon Swift. "Come on, Chick."

They reached the bottom of the mooring mast. It was unguarded, and they started to climb the steel steps. There were rest platforms at intervals, and they were glad of them long before they reached the top. The Shanson house was dwarfed as they climbed, and it seemed to Chick as though they ascended to the roof of the world.

At last they came to where the companionway, flexible and bending and groaning, connected the top rail platform with the forward gondola.

The wind up there was chilly, and moaned round the ship. It was as though a gigantic skyscraper was laid on its side and made to float in the air. There was an eeriness about it all which caused Chick to shiver. The massive thing was dipping by the head, straining at the mooring mast which bent in supple fashion to every pull.

Falcon Swift and Chick were standing on the platform, looking about them, when a man stepped from the covered companionway and said: "Hands up! What are you doing here?"

He held a rifle in his hand, and its muzzle covered Falcon Swift. He was a big fellow with a heavily jawed face, and as he spoke he stepped further on to the reeling platform of the mooring mast.

Chick Conway acted on instinct. He suddenly leapt forward, head down. The crown of his head connected with the fellow's solar plexus and, sending him reeling back towards the platform rail, at the same time caused him such pain that he loosed the rifle, which clattered against the platform, slid sideways, and went hurtling to the ground far below.

The man recovered on this, and made a dash at Falcon Swift. At the same time the platform lurched, causing him to slip. They saw him go sideways, his hands outflung wildly. Then, with a great cry, he went over the rail into the black void beneath.

It all happened so swiftly, that neither of them could do the least thing to save the man. From the ground, they heard a yell, and the noise of people moving, and they stared downwards. The dead man's last cry had been heard.

"Laddie," said Falcon Swift grimly, "if they find us here now, and if they're the sort of people we think they are, we're in danger. We've got to risk the interior of the airship. Come on."

He and Chick scuttled into the concertina-like gangway, and found themselves in the forward observation gondola. All about them were glass walls set with girders. From this gondola, a ladder led upwards to the forward gangway, and they shinned up the ladder as fast as they could.

They were now in the lower part of the body of the monster, travelling along a narrow passageway over duckboard planking, with, on either side of them, some of the hundreds of ballonet that held the gas.

Its immense length was dimly lighted by gridded electric lamps here and there, and it rolled and dipped slightly, and was criss-crossed with other passageways.

They climbed past the ballonet and came to a narrower passageway higher up. Above this the rounded top of the great ship dipped and lifted. There was another gangway, and Falcon Swift headed the way up this to a trap-door of some light alloy, which they opened and through which they climbed.

They found themselves on a vast platform, very long and fairly wide. It was railed round lightly, and it was open to the stars. They were on top of the *Empress of the Air*.

They could now hear voices from the platform on top of the mooring mast. Words flung here and there.

"He must have slipped. Leaning over I should think."

"But how . . . ?"

"Look here, the fool was always hanging over that rail. We haven't a lot of time, and . . ."

The voices died away. Suddenly the night's silence was broken by a ten-throated roar, and all through the great fabric ran an uneasy quiver.

She was swinging. They saw the mooring mast suddenly seem to break away. The ship was off, and they were lying on her roof, helpless to get away.

Sky Crooks.

A FEW drops of rain swept across their faces. There was a distinct pitch to the ship. They were in for a nasty night.

"I'm going down," said Falcon Swift. "Come on."

They got down among the ballonet and began to wander round. The ship had lifted very swiftly, climbing to about twelve thousand feet. She had a heavy roll to starboard, and that made travelling on the catwalk difficult. She was filled with creakings and groanings and the shattering roar of her engines, and there were many strange smells in her, fuel oil, varnish, and other odours.

They could hear rain slatting on her envelope, and now and again she dropped sickeningly beneath them.

"Dirty weather outside," muttered the Sporting Sleuth to Chick.

They passed the great tanks of fuel and lubricant, and they came to a spot on the central catwalk to which reached a low murmur of voices. It was plain, by looking fore and aft, that they were somewhere

near midway in the big envelope, and, therefore, the main saloon must be beneath them.

Falcon Swift and Chick dropped face downwards on the boards and the famous sleuth gently eased one of them away disclosing the tremendous network of girdering. They now could hear voices with some plainness, but the fabric prevented them from getting a view of the cabin below.

"It's a bad night, Shanson. We ought to give it the go-by."

Somebody laughed scornfully, and replied in educated English:

"And miss a hundred thousand pounds' worth of uncut diamonds? You must be mad, Varley."

There was movement below. A telephone-bell rang. Somebody answered it.

"All right. Slow the corresponding port engine down till you can fix it." The voice went on: "Something's gone wrong with one of the starboard engines. Is Bruce sure of his course on a night like this?"

"Any night," replied the voice which they knew to be Shanson's. "Well, I'm going into the control gondola. Coming?"

There was more movement. The men went out, passing along beneath the belly of the great ship, through a lighted corridor, to the forward control gondola.

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Falcon Swift and Chick looked at each other quickly. Varley was the name of a notorious jewel thief. All the Monocled Manhunter's theories were here confirmed.

There was more talk. Some of it they missed. It came to them in snatches.

"... over Picardy. This is his route. . . . That pencil mark. That cross is where we pick him up. . . . Better get the guns to the gondolas. . . ."

The guns! Once more Falcon Swift and Chick glanced at one another. So somewhere hidden in her, the *Empress of the Air* carried guns, which could be mounted when necessity demanded, and turn her into a battleship of the clouds.

Falcon Swift straightened himself. "They're going to attack something," he said. "Aeroplane, probably, as the man said who was shot on the hillside this afternoon—carrying a great value in uncut gems. Over Picardy. How can we stop them?"

As he said this, they heard a sound far distant behind them, and knew that men were coming up into the envelope. Instantly Falcon Swift realised why. The guns were hidden there.

He and Chick scuttled for the upper catwalk, and thence they made their way to the windswept vastness of the great platform on the ship's back.

Here all was chaos. She was beating dead south at about seventy miles an hour, with a south-west

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gale, rising, boring at her forward and to starboard, so that she dipped and rolled hideously.

Now and again great hot drops of rain were flung in vast masses at her, slating into the eyes of Swift and Chick, and half blinding them.

The Sporting Sleuth and Chick had, perforce, to lie down, else they had been blown off the great platform and sent hurtling to the sea far below.

For some time they lay, clutching at the steel supports of the rails, and then Falcon Swift said: "I think we're all right to get below, Chick. Let's risk it. They must have those guns by now, and, if possible, I want to queer their pitch."

As he spoke, he looked ahead. They knew they had passed the French coast. Some distance away, travelling levelly and fast, were the green and red starboard and port lights of a 'plane.

"We're too late!" gasped the detective. "We've got to hang on, Chick. We can do nothing."

The ship was coming round, ponderously, groaning under the lash of the wind. She was like a great living beast of the air, lurching in an attack.

From her forward gondola a great, long blade of light stabbed like a sword, piercing the black heart of the night. It swung for a moment and then checked, lighting up a big, black monoplane, with an immense spread of wing, which was cutting across the wind at over a hundred an hour.

The 'plane swerved, as though the light blinded its pilot. The big ship's engines were roaring all they knew. She was heading right across the 'plane's course, holding her fire. Those on board had to make sure with their first bursts of fire that they got their victim; otherwise their game was up.

The 'plane suddenly dipped. She intended to go to a lower level than that of the airship. And in that manoeuvre her pilot gave her into the hands of the enemy.

From the outer port and starboard gondolas of the airship machine-guns suddenly stammered of death—two guns in each gondola, firing from short range at a target which was brilliantly flayed by the great white light.

The 'plane lurched like a slain living thing. It turned over. A flutter of red and awful flame crept along one of its wings. Then it was going downwards, smashed and broken, burning, towards the black earth.

The airship was dropping, too, dropping like a stone, after its victim. There was vast confusion aboard her.

Falcon Swift and Chick Conway hardly dared watch the burning thing that went down into the dark pit beneath them.

Two things left the airship's sides, two things that suddenly opened and spread wide—white parachutes that floated men downwards. The ship's engines had ceased save for one to port and starboard which kept up a steady beat and held her in the wind.

There were two men now at the burning wreckage, which the rain was beating to coldness. They were searching. The searchlight showed them plainly. Suddenly one of them lifted his arms and stooped and began to pick things up—parcels scattered about. His companion joined him.

It was all terrible and unreal, uncanny; with the great ship riding as low as fifteen hundred feet.

More engine noise clattered within her. Through a big port in the bottom of her hull, a square box dropped on the end of a great cable, her observation car which could be lowered two thousand feet.

It clattered downwards, swinging like a big pendulum in the wind, while the ship heaved to its swing. Falcon Swift and Chick did not see the searchers clamber into the box, for the body of the ship hid them from view. The engine clattered again, and the box began to lift, and as it lifted they loosed water ballast from the ship itself and she shot upwards.

It was as she lifted high, winding in her observation car, that the trap leading from the interior of the gas-bag to the roof of the ship opened and two men climbed through . . . right beside Falcon Swift and Chick Conway!

The Gondola Captured.

CHICK was nearer the men than Falcon Swift, and as Swift moved the two of them threw themselves on to the boy, crying out something which was lost in the high, striding wind.

The boy sleuth, as he saw the two men coming at him, wriggled like an eel—or a boy—and the first of them missed him completely, smashing face downwards on to the metal of the platform. The other man got Chick's ankle and held it fast.

Then Falcon Swift joined in. He had got to his feet as the men came at them, and though his foothold was more than perilous, he charged in and stooped and grabbed the back of the collar of the man who held Chick.

The first man, he who had missed, had rolled sideways after his miss, and, grabbing desperately at any and every thing to save himself, seized the lip of the trap.

This seemed to give him an idea, for instead of going to the assistance of his colleague, he dived in through the trap and disappeared, to spread the news through the ship.

The man who struggled with Chick, found himself hauled to his feet by Falcon Swift, who snapped at him: "I want one of those gun gondolas. If you don't show me the way to it I'll shoot you."

His gun was pressed into the man's side and the terrified fellow was only too willing to do anything he was told.

Chick followed them as they went down through the trap. The storm was increasing in intensity, and the last thing Chick saw was a great forked stab of lightning away north east.

He attached no importance to it. In the rush of events, he did not remember that the wind was south-west, and that a storm always travels against the wind.

Down into the electrically lit and pitching interior of the gasbag they went, and they scuttled along a cross passage. They came at last to where a trap in the envelope gave access to a perilous path to a

small gondola, that hung and rolled beneath the mighty envelope—a latticed ladder, with handholds, and with no cover from the outer air.

"There's the port gun gondola," panted their guide. "If you want it. But what about me?"

"You come with us, sonny," replied Falcon Swift, grimly.

Now through the ship rang much clamour. A search party was out looking for the fugitives.

First they would make for the roof, and that would give Falcon Swift time to carry out the stratagem he had instantly devised when the man got away with his news.

The gondola below them was, like the others, steel framed, filled in with glass. It was lighted, and they could see a couple of men in it, dismantling the machine guns.

"Down you go," ordered Falcon Swift to their guide. "And don't waste time."

The man dropped through the trap on the latticed footway, and began to make his way along it. The two sleuths followed.

That alone was dangerous work. The lattice seemed too fragile to bear any weight. It swayed and bent and dipped in the wind, and the wind itself tore at Swift and Chick, as though it would rip them away and send them hurtling into the sea far below.

Their guide reached the door of the gondola, flung it open and yelled: "Look out!"

But he was just too late. Falcon Swift had anticipated some such manœuvre, and he took a literal jump from the latticed stepway, straight into the cabin, cannoning with the fellow's back, knocking him to his face, but retaining his own stance.

"As you say," he panted. "Look out. But what he really meant was—get down. Both of you. On your knees, and hold your arms."

Chick dropped into the gondola and slammed the door. The two men hesitated a moment and then jumped at Falcon Swift.

A shot rang out. The first of them dropped, wounded and hors de combat. The second got the Sporting Sleuth round the knees and heaved at him, while the man who had acted as guide, joined in the fight with enthusiasm.

But Chick was ready for him. The boy had got cold and wet up on that top platform, and he wanted something to warm him. A fight was the handiest thing.

He stepped in and met the second fellow with a straight right, flush on the nose. The punch stopped the man, staggered him slightly, and the ship did the rest.

She lurched in the most frightful fashion, and the man went headlong across the gondola, Falcon Swift and the other fellow following him in a heap of struggling humanity.

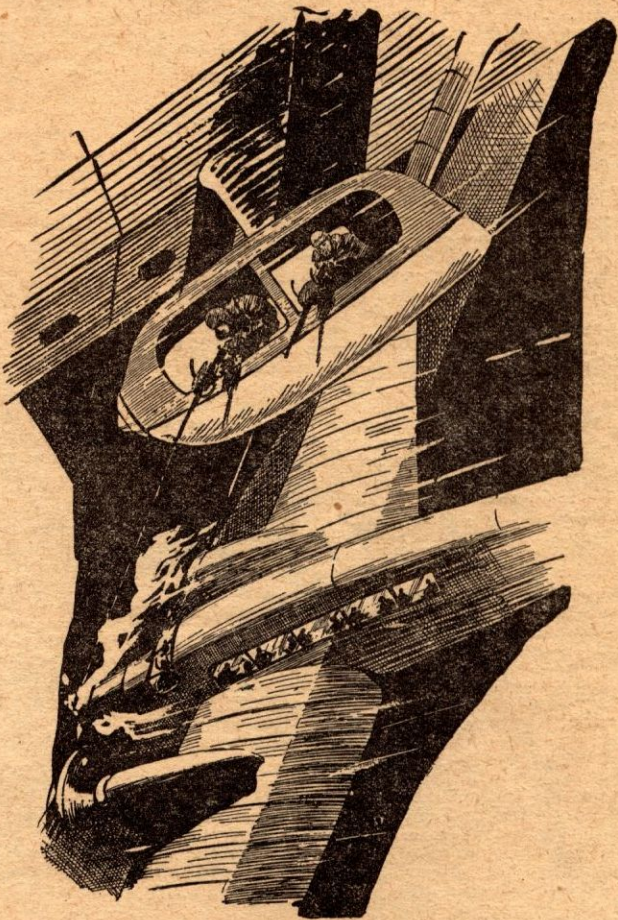
The man Chick had punched was laid out with that lurch. His head hit one of the girder frames of the gondola, and he lay very still.

That ended the fight. Falcon Swift was more than a match in a hand to hand combat with one

man, and his assailant stood no chance whatsoever. They got him tied up, and secured the stunned man. Then they swiftly bound the wound of the other fellow.

"Come on, laddie," panted Falcon Swift. "We've got to cut ourselves off. Give a hand."

There were various tools lying about, the tools used in dismantling the two machine guns. The Monocled Manhunter picked up one of these and opened the door. The wind came in and filled the



THE SHARK OF THE AIR.—The monoplane dipped to avoid the giant airship. At the same time a deadly burst of machine-gun fire came from the dirigible.

gondola with sound, while the two sleuths hacked away at the latticed lead-in from the envelope to the gondola.

The Sky Shark Smashed.

THEY had got one side of the ladder hacked clear when the trap above opened and a shot rang out. It crashed between them, and Falcon Swift jumped back.

"Hold on, laddie," he gasped. "We'll stop that soon enough."

The machine guns had already been taken from their fixed swivels, and were movable. In each of them was a drum of shells, half used.

Falcon Swift staggered with one of the guns to the doorway, and let fly with it.

Its vicious chatter rocked the air with sound. A man fell through the trap up above and went hurtling seawards. The door above slammed close, and the sleuth got to work on the lattice ladderway.

They shifted the other side, so that the ladder fell away, hanging and swinging from its top fixture, useless as a lead into the gondola.

The telephone bell shrilled, and Falcon Swift picked up the instrument. A voice he recognised came to his ears.

"I believe you are Falcon Swift. I can see you and recognise you clearly from the saloon. If you are willing to surrender you will be dealt with sympathetically. If not, we shall shoot you to bits. I am having the other guns brought into the saloon. I give you a minute in which to think it over. You can ring the control gondola by pressing the necessary connecting pushes on your telephone instrument."

"I don't need a minute," said Falcon Swift. "It's off, old chap. Mr. Shanson, isn't it?"

The receiver at the other end smashed into place. "Lights," whispered Swift to Chick. "We want darkness, laddie."

They found the switch, and turned out the lights. It made their position seem more terrible. The gondola was a fragile thing, minute in size, swinging beneath the tremendous gasbag of the giant airship.

The ship itself was making awful weather of it. She was riding high—probably fourteen thousand feet—but she could not get above the storm. Water ballast was pouring from her in great streams, but it did not seem to lift her. The heavy rain was slashing at her like lanceheads, and there was an obvious tendency to labour in her movement.

"I don't like it," said Falcon Swift to Chick. "These great things are as fragile as eggshells in any real weather. Look at that lightning."

Ahead of them lightning cleft the sky with vicious brilliant suddenness.

Chick whistled. "We're running right under the centre of the storm, Boss," he gasped.

"Ye . . . es . . ." very slowly. "Mr. Shanson's way home. And he's dead anxious to make it."

The telephone rang again, and Falcon Swift answered it. Shanson's frantic voice came through to them.

"Swift, you fool, I hope you never live to see morning. Do you know what you did when you fired that gun? You've pierced a number of the port ballonet. We're heavy enough as it is, but that's finishing us. We're losing altitude, and we can't make it by dropping ballast."

"Then we'll all crash together," said Falcon Swift and he hung up.

"Laddie, as I thought, the ship's in a serious way. Down!"

He flung himself face downwards in the darkness. From the direction of the now dark saloon had come the swift clatter of a machine gun, followed by another.

Bullets ripped and tore through the glass of the gondola, but did not shatter it, for it was unsplinterable.

"We won't have this," said the Sporting Sleuth. "I'm going to give them some of their own medicine."

He got a gun up, and he thumbed its mechanism. It stuttered and kicked, and Falcon Swift flung its muzzle in a wide spraying movement along the side of the main saloon.

The ship rolled terribly at that moment, and the famous 'tec lurched with it. The gun came round.

still stammering wickedly, and its black and horrid muzzle swung at the control gondola.

Glass gave before the hail of bullets. The helmsman pitched forward and lay still. Gauges were smashed and broken, and the light in the gondola went out.

The big ship came round in sullen, staggering fashion, and went reeling down wind broadside on. Once more the telephone went.

Shanson was screaming when Falcon Swift answered it. "You've crippled us. We're blind and out of control. You fool!" He added many epithets, but Swift did not stop to listen to them. He dropped the receiver down.

"Well, laddie," he said. "That was an unlucky chance. I slipped because the ship rolled and the gun slewed round in my hand."

He dropped as he spoke, and Chick with him. The gunners in the main saloon were drenching the gondola with shot, and once more the bullets crashed and tore through it.

The behaviour of the ship was now almost indescribable. The leading ballonet had blown their hasty patches, and the rain was soddening the fabric. Into the bargain, she had taken a nasty list on her, and one of her starboard engines had cut right out.

Men were working on the smashed steering apparatus as hard as they could, and it was possible that they might remake the severed connections. More water ballast poured from the ship as the cocks were opened. Her ballast tanks, in fact, were now emptied, and for a minute or two she rode the lighter, lifting, if anything.

Once more his telephone bell shrilled, and again Falcon Swift crawled in and answered it. Shanson spoke to him again. His voice was very calm, the calm of desperation and white-hot rage.

"Falcon Swift, we may never get out of this; and yet we may. Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to cut your gondola, and the starboard-gun gondola away, to lighten us and give us lift till we can outride the storm and get under control. We shall cut the gondolas away from inside the envelope where they're fixed to the framing."

"That's fine," said Falcon Swift quietly, and put down the receiver.

"What did he say, Boss," asked Chick, from the darkness.

Falcon Swift told him, and added: "Laddie, this may be the end. They'll save themselves and ensure our death at the same time."

Chick said nothing. He looked out. Lightning was forking wickedly away across the Downs of the English coast, miles from them. The rain was crashing against the glass and streaming through the bullet holes. The great ship was dipped by the head, and lolling all over the place. Once more from the saloon came the crash of gunfire.

"Listen," said Swift. "We've got one chance. It's dark here and they can't see us. We'll open that door, and jump for the severed ladder and hang to it. Game?"

"Anything, Boss," said Chick, through clenched teeth. Anything, indeed, was better than hurtling to the sea in this closed box.

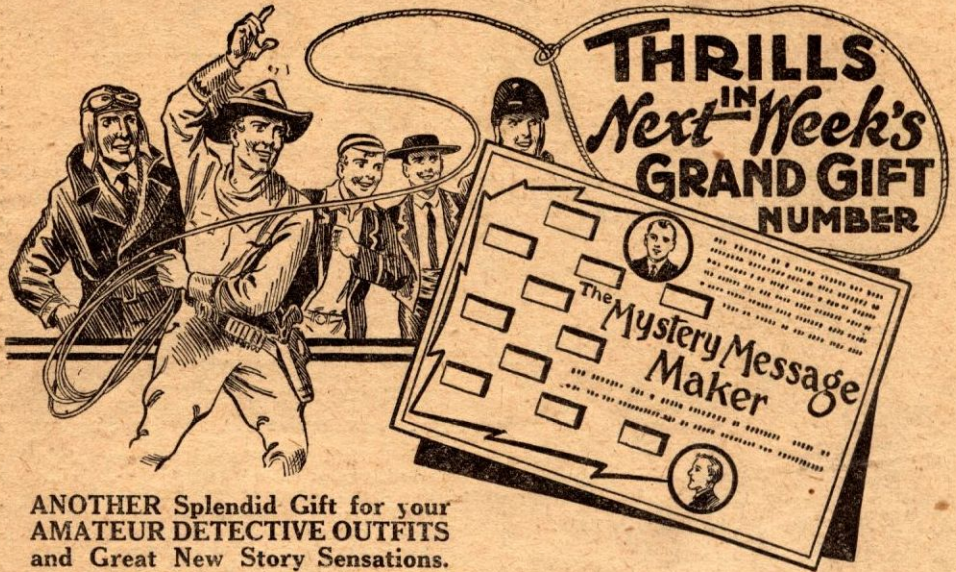
Suddenly the gondola dropped sideways. The ship also at that moment lifted with a rush. The starboard gondola had gone.

"Come on!" panted Falcon Swift. "We've no time to lose."

He opened the door. Some distance from them the lattice ladder stood, swaying from its top fixings. The wind tore at them and the rain nearly blinded them.

(Continued on page 12.)

THE EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS CHUMS



ANOTHER Splendid Gift for your AMATEUR DETECTIVE OUTFITS and Great New Story Sensations.

MY DEAR CHUMS,

One of the forms of initiation favoured by the Camorra, most dreaded of the Italian secret societies, was as follows. A number of fully fledged members, clad in their cloaks and broad-brimmed hats stood in a circle round a coin placed on the floor. At a signal the newcomer had to grab for the coin while the Camorristi struck at it with their knives—often terribly gashing the novice's hand in the process.

Initiation into the *Boys' Magazine* Detective Club is, fortunately for us all, nothing like so drastic. In fact, the mere act of placing the dandy badge given this week into your buttonhole makes you a member and allows you to participate in all the privileges. These constitute help on any subject relating to sleuth work—and the other ripping items for your Detective Outfit to be given each week inside the *Mag.* These include

The Mystery Message Maker,

a supply of Invisible Ink with message chart; Patent Fingerprint Taker and Chart; Detective's Duplicator, etc., etc. The Mystery Message Maker will be tucked inside every copy of next week's *Mag.* This ingenious contrivance will give you many hours of fun. It writes messages in a secret code which can only be solved with the aid of the Message Maker itself. Look out for this ripping gift next week and get ready for the rest of the apparatus for these Splendid Detective Outfits to be given each week inside our paper.

In the *Mag.* I shall also print hints on clue-finding; how to identify fingerprints; secret codes and how to solve them; making invisible ink—when the supply given for the detective outfit has run out; how to build up theories, etc. In addition to this unique gift scheme I have planned a whole series of Special Thrill numbers of *Boys' Mag.*

This week you will have read the opening chapters of

Doom to the Flying Circus!

Next Saturday, the further adventures of Don and Dick against the menace of the Scarred Hand will keep you on edge with excitement. Dick, in the clutches of Hsuan, son of Chang, is faced with a terrible fate. But the resource and daring of the boy acrobat enable him to outwit his enemies in a spectacular way. How he accomplishes this I'll leave you to discover next week.

I must also draw your attention, my masters, to the great new cowboy series which kicks off this week. You'll follow the dramatic developments in Jack Jakers' fight for his brother's honour with the Dandy Cowboy and his punchers who are lured to

Red Mask's Lair!

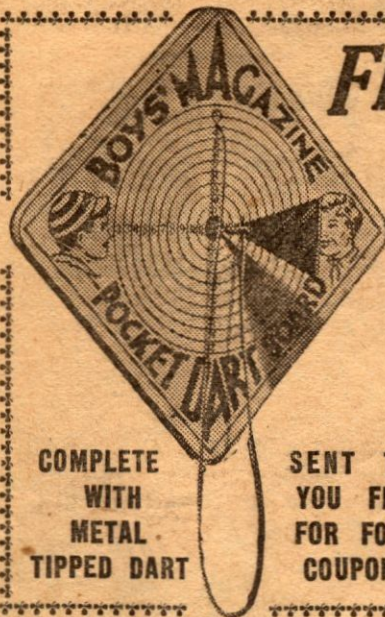
Yes, chaps, the Boys of the Bar-Eight Ranch are well in the limelight next week. And their gun-crashing exploits are told in a double length tale which cannot fail to thrill you.

Even new readers will have heard of the Boys of St. Giddy's. This famous band of schoolboys appears only in *Boys' Magazine*. And for thrills, for characters that live, no other school yarns can touch them. Next week they take their accustomed place in the *Mag.* With the coming of

The Schoolboy from Spain

to the school of laughter, larks, and lickings, excitement and dramatic episodes start with a *wham!* The newcomer is actually a young Spanish Bandit, whom the Joyous Juniors met during their Easter holidays in the land of the bullfight. Behind his banditry is a secret; he is really a Royalist and Pablo Mendez, a bloodthirsty brigand, posing as a republican, is seeking to rob Don Pedro Innocentio Ramon Diego Alvarez (to give him his full name) of his family treasure. Don Pedro brings his wealth to his English school—and Pablo Mendez comes, too! That's when the fur begins to fly, but thanks to Johnny Gee & Co., it is Pablo's fur! Get ready to be gripped and

(Continued on page 36.)



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COUPONS.

SKY SHARK'S LOOT

(Continued from page 10.)

Falcon Swift jumped first, and he got a hold of the crosspieces of the ladder, clinging for dear life, till he could haul himself upwards. Chick hesitated. The black depth was awful below him.

Chick took off, and as he did so the gondola hurtled away seawards and the ship jumped into the air. Chick only got one hand to the ladder, but another hand clutched his shoulder and pulled on him—the hand of Falcon Swift.

"We've got to get inside," yelled the Sporting Sleuth. "We can't hold on here. Come on."

Lightning flayed round them. They began to climb, and with this the door above opened and they saw a man looking down on them. He held a rifle. He lifted it to his shoulder, but he never pulled its trigger.

There was another flash of lightning, blinding and awful. Above Falcon Swift and Chick, it seemed as though the heavens themselves had fallen on the *Empress of the Air*.

Blue flame fed about her. Red fire suddenly appeared at her dipped stem. She went sideways and down like a bullet, crushed under an atmospheric disturbance, compared with which her five thousand horse-power engines were clockwork toys.

Her forepart tore away and went lurching downwind. Her stern section fell waterwards with a rush.

Falcon Swift and Chick, clinging to the ladder, saw the sea come up to meet them; and only the fact that their gondola had been in the forepart of the vessel saved their lives; for that forepart steadied in its fall, while the rest of the mighty fabric went into the sea like a plummet.

They were down—into high water, running madly across the monstrous bulk to which they clung.

They saw lights near, the red and green lights of a great ship. The lights were swinging round. All across the sea was wreckage, and part of the monstrous heaving pile of the partly inflated envelope still blazed.

It was this blaze which led to the saving of Falcon

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Swift and Chick. It shed a red light across the water that died quickly, but not before it had shown them to the officer in charge of one of the ship's boats.

Powerful hands seized them. They were hauled inboard. In a minute or two they were on the ship. She was Tilbury bound from the East.

Only two other men survived the loss of the *Empress of the Air*—Merritt Shanson and his chief engineer.

Falcon Swift was present at the Old Bailey when the Lord Chief Justice sentenced both men to death.

The Boys of St. Giddy's—the Mag.'s famous School-story stars in "The Schoolboy from Spain" next week, chums. Make sure of the Mystery Message Maker for your Amateur Detective Outfits.

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**BOYS' MAGAZINE LEAGUE
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Boys' Magazine, 13/5/33.

GREAT NEW SERIES OF COMPLETE WILD WEST YARNS, FEATURING THE DANDY COWBOY AND THE BOYS OF THE BAR-EIGHT RANCH.



RED MASK OF THE RIO GRANDE

Red Mask! Who is He? The Elusive Outlaw of the Badlands Makes His Bow in the First Yarn of his Exploits Told Below.

Holed Up.

IT looked like Señor Red Mask's last fight. The picturesque bandit of the border crouched in a hollow, his long six guns in his hands.

All around was the mysterious whispering brush of the Brasada, that great stretch of badlands between the Neuces River and the Rio Grande, with the Southern Texas moon giving to it the effect of a giant stage.

Into this giant depression, Señor Red Mask had ridden, hoping to escape across the border. But the posse had ridden too hard at his heels. And now the mysterious bandit was at bay.

Around were other clumps of brush that hid men. And before the bandit's eyes lay the way to safety, a towering wall of living rock, with a narrow fissure between—a gap with the sullen sheen of the Neuces river showing beyond.

Once across that river the bandit would have been safe beyond the border. But the passage was guarded by a flaring camp fire, around which crouched men of the posse hunting him.

"Why, some of 'em's the Bar-Eight pards!" ejaculated the holed-up outlaw softly as he saw a pig-tailed Chinkie pot wrestler busy with a great billy-can over the fire.

Rex Remington, the Bar-Eight boss himself, was there, tall, with a panther-like grace; so also were bearded Tex McNaughten, the bow-legged Spider McCabe—and Jack Jakers, the young foreman of that famous spread. At him the masked bandit was gazing with a queer intentness.

There was a bleak look in the masked bandit's eyes.

Just such a carefree cowboy as Jack Jakers he might have been, but for an ill-starred destiny. Those were his bitter thoughts. Then suddenly he chuckled.

"Having grub, are they?" he murmured. He squinted for aim and let fly.

Bang! With a crash one support of the stewartop snapped. The vessel itself fell and tipped over, spilling its contents over Wun Lun's foot. With yells of pain the Chinkie cook pranced about on one foot. His cries brought the other Bar-Eight boys crowding around, to see what injury Wun Lun had suffered and to help him.

But that shot was the signal for the grim business to recommence. It located Señor Red Mask, and men got up from the brush, intent again on smoking him out.

Señor Red Mask swept up his stern guns. He was wounded badly, both his arms being bound with blood-soaked bandages. His powder-smear'd mouth twisted in a smile like a mocking grimace at death.

"These barrels are shore getting hot," he croaked.

What he meant was that he was running short of ammo. He had just coolly prodded in his last six cartridges, three into the chambers of each gun.

Eyes like those of an eagle, icy slits in the crimson mask, peered out. Six men were creeping forward now with an implacable purpose, in a thin, strung-out line.

They were led by Dade Denham, the most powerful rancher in the Pecos Valley. Huge of stature and black-bearded, Dade Denham was said to have suffered more than any from El Señor Red Mask's rustling depre'dations.

Dade Denham fanned his hammer feverishly as a white-shirted shoulder of the masked bandit was exposed to view. A bullet ploughed in Red Mask's shoulder, burning his flesh as it tore him half-around. His laugh was a crazed snarl.

"I'm coming for you, Red Mask!" cried out Dade Denham furiously.

Determinedly the thin line of men were coming on now, with blue-black gun barrels spraying a fierce hail of lead before them.

The desperate Señor Red Mask raised himself with difficulty and addressed a ruinous fire at the charging posse with cool, calculating precision. Men dropped. None was killed. Three only came on now, the bearded rancher amongst them.

Crash! Crash! Shattering echoes rolled through the night and redoubled the din. With hoarse cries two more men fell and rolled over.

There remained only Dade Denham, ploughing his way up the knoll. And now, the smoking guns of *El Rojo*, the Red One, were silent. Shore, it looked like *El Señor Red Mask's* last fight.

"Got yuh, yuh sneaking coyote! Try tuh double-cross me, would yuh?"

Señor Red Mask stared up at the powerfully built, spade-bearded rancher, and his lip twisted in that bitter smile.

He crouched in the hollow, a *caballero* garbed in the flat-crowned hat and cloak of old Spain, his person adorned with silver spurs and all the glittering trappings handed down by the Conquistadors. Over the upper part of his features he wore a vivid crimson half-mask. It was said that no man had ever seen his face.

"Yuh come fer me, Dade?" he whispered, for he was badly wounded and breath was coming hard.

"Yeah, yuh snake!" sneered Dade Denham. "Yuh've been playing two ways. Running with th' Bar-Eight Ranch, trying tuh double-cross me?"

Señor Red Mask shook his head voicelessly. Thus far he had been loyal to the man he served. And that man was Dade Denham.

Dade Denham, the biggest rancher in the Pecos Valley was in reality a rustler baron! None knew it but Señor Red Mask.

"Ain't been in cohorts with th' Bar-Eight Ranch—not a-tall," the masked bandit whispered.

"Yuh lie," growled the rancher in a fierce, low tone. With a sudden gesture he bent down and snatched, the crimson mask from the bandit's face.

"Why, yuh're that same Jack Jakers, foreman of th' ranch!" he snarled.

The border bandit shook his head dumbly. That was why all these years he had worn a mask.

"Yuh know what I'm gonna do with you?" ground out Dade Denham in a tone of utter, cold ferocity. "I'm gonna blot you out right now. Dead men don't talk."

He thumbed back the hammer of his long, blue-bored Colt, and his finger curled to squeeze the trigger.

Br-rang! A Colt gave throat harshly, deafeningly. But it was not Dade Denham's revolver. His dropped from his hands, and he lurched and crashed down into the hollow.

A puncher, with a smoking gun in his hand, burst into the bandit's hole-up. Lithe, pantherish, Jack Jakers, the foreman of the Bar-Eight Ranch, bent beside the man he had shot and turned him over.

"Just creased—like I intended," he breathed.

Now he turned swiftly to Señor Red Mask, the mysterious, elusive border bandit who had defied and rustled from the ranchers of the Pecos Valley for so long.

One glance and he started violently. Stared for long moments, with utter bewilderment dawning on his own face. The young foreman had a feeling as of staring into a mirror at his own reflection.

Then memory came—sharp poignant memories. Of himself and another lad on the old homestead farm in Omaha. His brother—his twin brother, whom he had not seen in an age, it seemed like.

"You, Jerry . . ." he cried hoarsely.

The bandit gave a shamed nod. "Sorry, feller . . . tuh kinda . . . smear up th' name," he mumbled. "I guess they got me."

Jack Jakers dropped to his twin brother's side, and he gripped his hand. His twin—yes, and they were as like as two peas! His brother Jerry . . . an outlaw!

"Better yuh'd let that skunk Denham shoot me dead," the young bandit whispered. "I'm in a tight, Jack—an'—an' it means th' rope. Ain't no other way fer rustlers."

"By heifers, no; not that!" The young foreman's jaw jutted, his eyes seemed to flash fire as he rapped out the words. He stared into the brush with rigid face, his mind fumbling for some way of escape.

The blood call, stronger than any other, had stirred in him. And they were shouting from the brush now; there was little time.

"Listen! I gotta take yuh in," the young foreman said hoarsely. And then he fell to, swift whispers.

"But my hoss is lamed by a bullet," objected the wounded outlaw.

"Yuh take mine," decided the young Bar-Eight foreman, swiftly as he bound his brother up. His idea was to lead his brother up as a captive to the camp fire—and then at the crucial moment Red Mask would be able to break free from the cunningly looped lariat, and make a dash for it across the Necees river.

But if anything went wrong—why then, not only would Señor Red Mask become doomed, but the young Bar-Eight foreman would be stamped with the brand of outlaw, his life in jeopardy.

The young foreman led Señor Red Mask's horse out from the brush, where it remained concealed; and even as he looked at it, the young Bar-Eight foreman gasped in dismay.

This was no true outlaw's horse, for it was a huge, conspicuous red stallion; a silken-coated mass of fiery ambition. But then Señor Red Mask would ride a good horse; a red stallion.

He called his horse Danger, and the magnificent red animal was lamed by a bullet that had ploughed into its right shoulder.

Jack Jakers helped the wounded outlaw up on his own blue roan, and himself swung up into the stirrup of Danger. Then, leading the now masked and cloaked outlaw by the rope, he rode forward.

As the horses *clip-clopped* out of the brush Jack Jakers felt his every nerve tingling. It seemed impossible that the dash for safety could succeed. Behind the young foreman Red Mask was swaying in the saddle. He was calling entreatingly:

"It ain't no good, Jack, feller. Say, I have something tuh tell yuh. There's a plot against the Bar-Eight . . ."

Jack Jakers rode on unheedingly with his masked prisoner. It was as though the very air throbbled with the menace of hidden men and guns.

"Why, by cows—Jack Jakers has done grabbed him th' outlaw!" shouted Tex McNaughten, suddenly.

Shouts arose from all sides then. Men came running out of the brush. Only the Bar-Eight pards looked incredulous—surprised. At once they spotted the change of horses. Rex Remington, the Bar-Eight boss stood with his hands on his hips, alert and wary. His eyes were narrowed to shining slits. Behind him grouped his cowboys, all, even Wum Lun, staring suspiciously.

Amid the delighted shouts that filled the air, Jack Jakers gave vent to the old Bar-Eight range cry. But there was a subtle infection in it, an appeal for help to his Bar-Eight buddies.

"Whoop-a-loo-roo!"

The Dandy Cowboy, immediately took the cue. He stood forth from the crowd and gestured him to a halt. "Fine work, Jack!" he cried, his white teeth flashing in a smile. "Ah—"

As the men crowded round the apparently bound figure of Red Mask, the *riata* suddenly flew away in the air like an uncoiling snake, and the mounted outlaw's horse leapt as Señor Red Mask sank his spurs deep.

His guns were out, loaded guns now. "Look, wild *caballeros!*" His voice thundered through the night. "Señor Red Mask speaking."

He flashed for the ford with a wild drumming of hoofs. Pandemonium broke out behind. Men sprang for their horses, leapt into the saddles. They would get Señor Red Mask yet.

As his horse splashed through the swollen yellow waters of the Neuces, Señor Red Mask turned around and swept the pursuers with his guns—his last defiance. A laugh rang from his lips, deep and musical. Then he urged his horse deeper into the stream.

Brang! Br-rang! His pursuers came swimming behind. The farther bank now was within measurable distance of Señor Red Mask. But they would pursue him beyond.

A shout suddenly went up. Delighted curses filled the air. They had got him—got Red Mask. Jack Jakers, watching on horseback, from the other bank, all at once felt his heart freeze.

Señor Red Mask—his twin brother, Jerry—had

that cast a splash of black shadow in the silvered moonlight. The riderless horse dashed on through the brush, its drumming hoofs rolling away.

But the recumbent figure in the red cloak leapt and tumbled amongst the brush in a vain effort to escape.

Shots followed it, and men ran amongst the brush calling upon Red Mask to give up. At last a lucky shot brought that red-cloaked figure to stillness, and the men scrambling through the brush, seized upon it.

Shouts went up. Wrathful shouts. Then amazed, incredulous laughter. Señor Red Mask had escaped after all. Amongst the folds of the red cloak they found a coyote, dead now from a bullet.

Almost the men of the posse were willing to concede the resourceful bandit his liberty as they came back laughing and talking.

But in the sink on the other side of the river suspicion was raising its ugly head. Staggering out of the brush, came Dade Denham, owner of the great Twin-Spot outfit. He was amazed, incredulous, fearful at learning of Red Mask's escape.

"Someone shot me from th' brush," he muttered thickly. "Why, why—look—that . . ."

He threw out an arm, with index finger pointing wildly. A party of riders was making off through the brush. Rex, the Bar-Eight boss, riding his



A "POT" SHOT.—Red Mask took aim and pulled the trigger. The bullet snapped one leg of the tripod supporting the stew-pot, and sent the stew over Wun Lun's foot.

fallen from the saddle; had become engulfed by the swollen waters of the Neuces river. The horse was swimming on, riderless. It was the end of Señor Red Mask.

But, no . . . was it? The horse was scrambling up on to the bank now, and in the bright moonlight that, nevertheless, cast deceptive shadows amongst the brush, it was seen that a red-cloaked figure was being dragged at the end of a lariat by the rushing, riderless horse.

Shots and cries followed it. Suddenly the figure in the red cloak lay still under a great clump of brush

famous black racing stallion; Tex McNaughten, huge, bearded, upright in the deep cowboy's saddle of a Bar-Eight mustang; Wun Lun, crouched forward, misshapen like a jockey over his curious pie-bald pony, and—Jack Jakers, the foreman, riding a red stallion that was limping.

"Doggone it!" roared Dade Denham, jerking forward. "That's him—that's Señor Red Mask. What yuh jaspers doing letting him go like that? That's Señor Red Mask riding his big red hoss, Danger, I'm telling yuh."

A laugh greeted him. "Yuh're crazed with th'

beat. That's Jack Jakers, foreman of th' Bar-Eight spread."

Jack looked anxiously round as they loped away. He had urged the Bar-Eight pards to go. His face was white and strained. He knew that his pards were casting queer glances at him.

They had been returning from Dodge City after having delivered a trail herd of cattle to the railroad, when they had been called to join the posse. The cowboys were saddle-weary, keen to get to the ranch, and had at once fallen in with Jack's suggestion.

Nevertheless there was a strained atmosphere. Jack Jakers, their foreman, was riding an outlaw's horse. And things had been happening plumb queer.

Dade Denham's Plot.

"BY gosh, here come all the King's horses and men —with Dade Denham leading the way."

Brilliant hot sunshine flooded the ranch buildings and outhouses of the Bar-Eight spread, set against the blue of the San Miguel mountains. Over the sage came a vast number of riders, galloping their broncs, zipping wildly and raising their gauntleted hands in greeting.

The mystery of the previous night had not been explained. Jack Jakers, their young foreman, had offered no word of how he had come to aid a notorious outlaw to escape, and to be riding his red stallion.

It was the Dandy Cowboy who had called his punchers' attention to the oncoming horsemen. The Bar-Eight boss pushed back his sombrero and stared with keen eyes, thumbs hitched in his belt.

By the unwritten law of the West if a man raises his arm in greeting his intentions are interpreted to be friendly. Dade Denham had brought most of the Pecos Valley men over for a visit. But was it really friendly?

Surprise parties were known as a custom in the South-West cattle country. A bunch of cowboys sometimes brought their own grub, accordions and so forth, and landed on a neighbouring ranch for a party. This was ostensibly the intention of Dade Denham and his crowd.

"Come tuh clean yuh outer house and home!"

"Crap games, rodeo contests, or what yuh have. We're throwing a party tuh celebrate Red Mask's getaway," cried Dade Denham jovially.

The Dandy Cowboy guessed that something more sinister lay behind the proposed "party." Dade Denham had come to probe, find out things. The Bar-Eight boss caught sight of Jack Jakers' haggard face, and strained eyes and felt a sense of shock.

Something was very much wrong—but what.

The Bar-Eight pards appeared to surrender to the spirit of the occasion. There were jovial greetings, much back-slapping and manhandling, as is the way of the West. And when rodeo contests were mooted even Jack Jakers suddenly became animated.

"Betcha can't ride that mean one, Dade," he said, pointing to the horse corral.

Dade Denham's eyes, deep-set, black and bright, with a glitter in their dark depths that was not of merriment, had been scanning the horse corral for some time ominously, significantly.

Jack Jakers felt a tug of wild fear at his heart. The red stallion he had spirited away the night before into the foothills—his twin's big red horse, Danger. But—his own blue roan was back in the corral.

His twin brother, El Señor Red Mask, the outlaw, was hiding somewhere about the ranch! Hiding—wounded! Jack's loyal spirit rose up to shield his twin.

He pointed to the mean one, a dun-coloured, wall-eyed bronco. If Dade Denham tried to fork that horse—maybe he'd pitch straight into eternity.

Some such wild thought as this flashed through Jack's distracted mind.

"It don't look a mean actor," Dade Denham drawled slowly. "Yuh don't call that an outlaw hoss?"

"Yeah. That hoss is one ring-tailed whizzer. Betcha hundred smackers yuh can't stick on him."

Dade Denham turned; all his lazy indifference was gone; his eyes flashed venom. "Bet yuh two hundred dollars yuh can't."

There was a laugh at this from the men who had crowded round. Jack Jakers flushed. He knew the meek-looking dun horse was the wickedest thing in the south-west. Yet something reckless in him flared and made him accept the dare.

"I'm on!"

The brute was led out with a halter, its white teeth flashing now. "Good-bye," said Denham, standing back, "any last message?"

"Not to you," smiled Jack, sticking toe in stirrup and going up with a rush.

Right then the assembled cowboys saw something. Yessir. The dun catapulted forward—stopped. Then as the young foreman's quirt lashed it, the hoss went rocketing upwards.

It came down with stiffened legs. Then in a flash whirled the other way. Jack Jakers worked his quirt crossways, just to show what he could do—and the dun started his special fireworks.

Coming down from a particularly high buck with a bone-jarring jolt, its front knees suddenly gave way, and with incredible speed it pitched forward and rolled over.

The young foreman was ready for that. He jumped and rolled clear, springing for the stirrup even as the horse scrambled up again.

Now the enraged, squealing horse folded in his legs and went sun-fishing, dropping like a ton of bricks. Then it went away like a thunderbolt, to rocket upwards under the branches of a tree.

But Jack was not there. He was hanging in one stirrup, but leaning right over, Indian fashion, as the dun crashed up amongst the stout branches of the tree.

The wicked horse was mad clean through. It rushed at the corral fence and crashed its right side into the bars. The yelling punchers saw Jack gracefully lift one leg over from the stirrup, and let the brute have all the shock of the impact. Again and again that happened.

Then suddenly the brute went haywire. It went away in a mad pounding run—straight for the bunkhouse door.

Crash! It was a head-on smash collision. The door split lengthwise and the horse tumbled through with a broken neck, pitching its rider over its head through into the bunkhouse. A great yell came from the excited cowboys at that unexpected finale. The mean one had killed itself in its rage. But what about its rider?

Breathless and not a little bruised, Jack Jakers picked himself up in the darkened bunkhouse. He was not really hurt much. But suddenly he started violently as he heard a low cry.

"Jack, feller . . . I had tuh come back—tuh warn you."

Looking up he saw Señor Red Mask of the Río Grande peering at him over the edge of one of the bunks.

"Jerry, boy! . . . They're after yuh!" he cried aghast. "Dade Denham has come here, with th' whole crowd at his back."

"I know"—simply. "Listen, Jack; it's not me that's in danger; it's yuh, th' whole of th' Bar-Eight bunch. Say, yuh gotta listen."

There was not time for much conversation between the twins. Briefly, simply Señor Red Mask recounted the details of Dade Denham's dastardly plot against the Bar-Eight. He wanted to get hold of the ranch—just to add that piece of patchwork to the vast quilt of his land holdings in the Pecos Valley.

His plan was simple; to direct the pointing finger of suspicion against them. The Bar-Eight boys had just returned from Dodge City, after selling their cattle there. Always game for a spree, they had gone into the Ace-High Saloon in Dodge City, and by strangest chance, between them they had cleared out the bank—at crap, which is simply rolling dice.

"They were meant tuh win, Jack," said Señor Red Mask in low, quick tones. "The dice were loaded tuh let 'em win. Yuh see, the banknotes they won all come from that bank robbery in Dodge City the day before. And the serial numbers are known tuh

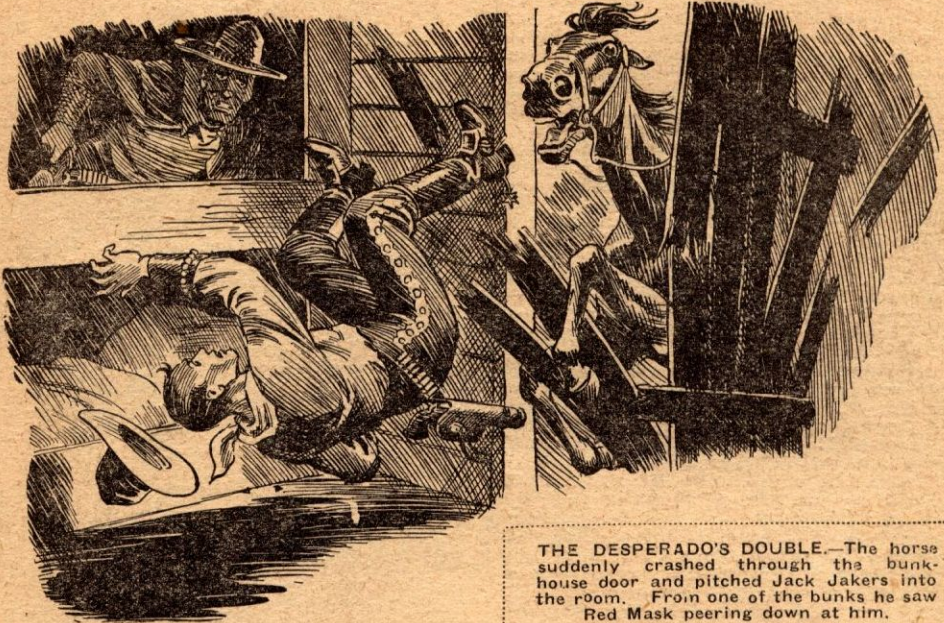
Caught Cheating.

THE tobacco smoke drifted in the Bar-Eight bunkhouse in heavy stratas. The room with its long table was crowded to capacity, and excitement ran high.

A game of crap was going forward, and Jack Jakers, the young foreman of the Bar-Eight was taking the bank. His cheeks were flushed, and there was an unnatural glitter in his eyes. He was winning heavily, and a heap of crisp new notes lay on the table before him.

Strangely enough it was from his own pards of the Bar-Eight Ranch that he was winning, mostly. Punchers of other outfits won and lost. When they won they were always paid out in old notes; not the new ones.

Those were slowly but surely collecting in a pile before Jack Jakers. They were the notes stolen in



THE DESPERADO'S DOUBLE.—The horse suddenly crashed through the bunkhouse door and pitched Jack Jakers into the room. From one of the bunks he saw Red Mask peering down at him.

the dicks—the detective are coming tuh the Bar-Eight tuh track th' bank robbers here. Dade Denham set 'em on it, Jack," he concluded earnestly. "Yuh've gotta get them planted notes away from the Bar-Eight punchers."

Jack turned round swiftly, his head in a whirl. The surging crowd of cowboys were coming towards the bunkhouse. There was no time for more.

"Get under th' blankets," he hissed to his twin.

When the anxious inquirers came through the splintered door, he was smiling, cool and apparently unconcerned.

"I guess I sat that bronc. And now I'm ready for chow, if'n that Chink pot-rasser's chased any up," he smiled. "And then afterwards, boys, what about a li'l game of crap?"

There was loud, hearty assent to that. But at the back of Jack Jakers' head one thought was dawning. He had got to get those notes, stolen in the bank robbery, away from the Bar-Eight pards before the detectives came down from Dodge City.

the bank robbery, and planted on the Bar-Eight pards in Dodge City.

The Dandy Cowboy was not playing. But he was regarding his foreman pard with a queer, intent gaze. Bud Malone, the fat cowboy, had just thrust on to the table a hundred dollars in bills won in Dodge City. All the rest were cleaned out of notes; all the Bar-Eight pards, that is. Even Wun Lun, the wily Chink, had lost his notes. He, too, was staring at the young foreman queerly.

The Chink's almond eyes were diamond-like in their intensity. He thought he heard a click as the dice were handed over to Bud Malone.

Bud Malone was now cupping the dice in his hands, rattling them.

"Be good tuh me, bones," he implored.

He threw them; and the swiftly spinning dice slowed and settled. Everybody gasped. A single dot stared up from each dice. Snakes' eyes. Bud Malone had lost his money—lost all those notes.

(Continued on page 36.)

SANGSTER'S CIRCUS ON SECRET SERVICE!

Our Dazzling New Yarn of a Circus in the Air; of Drama, Mystery, Excitement and a Dreadful Vengeance Plot. Begins its Triumphant Run!

By
H. WEDGWOOD BELFIELD.

The Red Avenger.

RED light flooded that underground room. It dyed barbaric hangings a deeper crimson and splashed the paved floor like blood—touched the swirling incense-fumes from two golden censers with the same sinister hue, and lent added horror to the cruel, immobile features of the squatting idol which seemed to dominate that place of evil.

Before the idol a man knelt on a tiger-skin rug. He was a Chinaman, clad in a voluminous robe of the richest Chi-fu silk with crimson dragons sprawling on a black background. His face was invisible except for slant, yellow eyes, that glowed with tigerish ferocity as he extended his arms towards the crouching joss. His voice, shrill and high-pitched, rose liltily on the silence.

"Give ear, O gods of my illustrious ancestors. My father sought to make the yellow race as unconquerable as the wind that rides the heavens. But even as grass, was he cut down in the flower of his success. The foreign devils slew him—he and all who served the Scarred Hand. I only—Hsuan, whom Chang the Mighty was preparing for a high destiny at the universities of the barbarians—am left. For the son of Chang, Destiny holds but one thing."

He touched the idol's feet with his forehead. Then, as he flung himself back, his slant eyes blazed with the fire of his terrible wrath. His voice dropped to a low, hissing snarl.

"Chang is slain, but the Red Avenger lives. Give ear to my vow. Not one of the foreign devils who encompassed the fall of Chang the Mighty shall escape my vengeance. Death shall come to them in a manner of which men shall fear to speak. And then, too late, the foreign devil shall learn that the Son of Chang is greater than his illustrious ancestor."

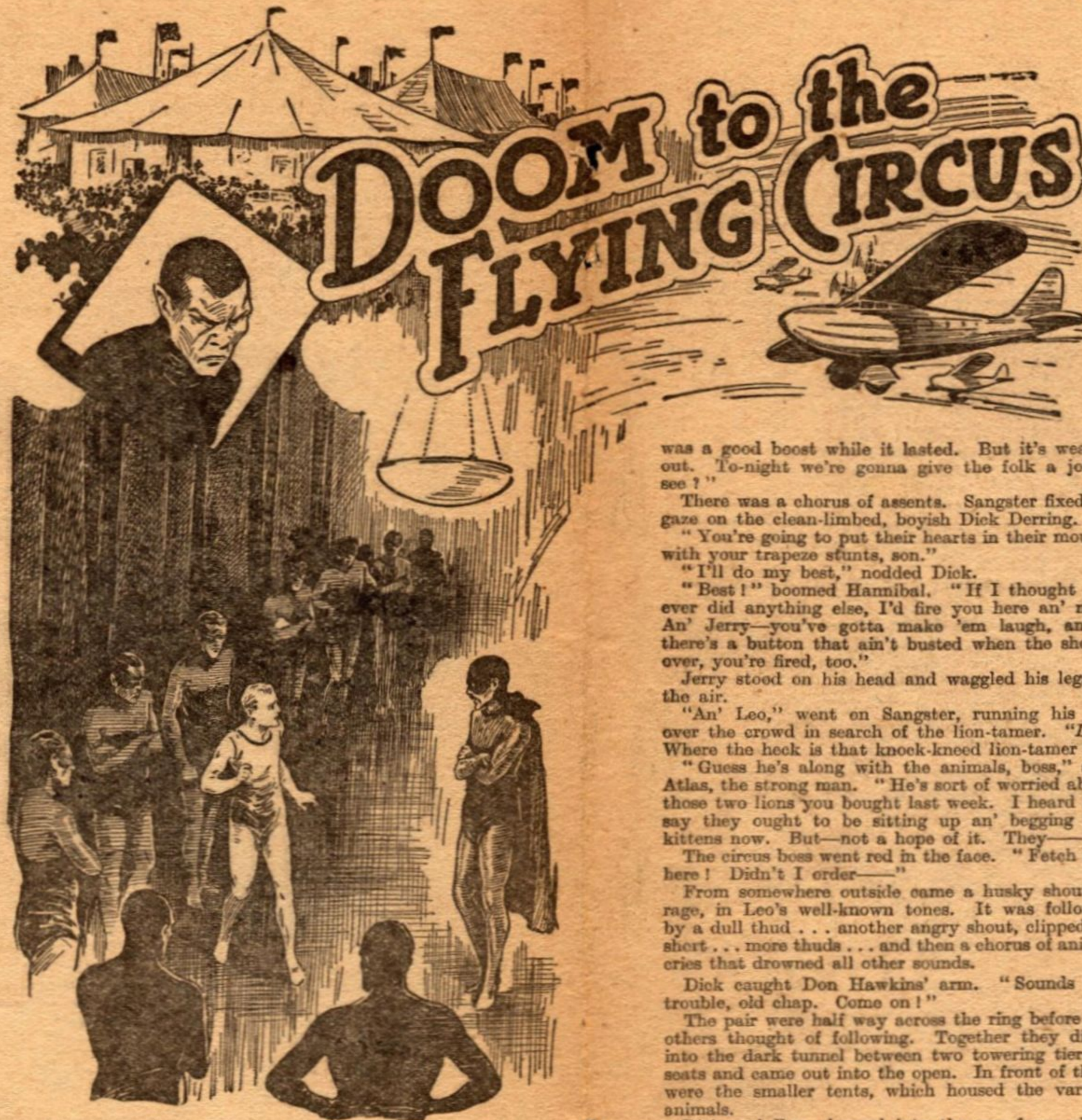
A laugh—mirthless, evil and menacing—broke from him. Chang was dead—smashed by Dick Derring and his pals of Sangster's Flying Circus—but the Red Avenger had come!

Back from the Dead.

HANNIBAL SANGSTER, the big boss of the Flying Circus, surveyed the crowd clustered around him with a paternal air. A cheery crowd it was—the finest troupe of circus stars ever assembled for a single show.

Sangster believed in doing the big thing. The mammoth tent—empty now, with its tiers of seats vanishing into the obscurity of dusk—would have swamped a dozen ordinary circus tents. The huge aeroplanes, built with cages in the wings to accommodate the unmatched collection of performing animals, were still one of the world's wonders.

And the artistes—well, all the world knew Dick Derring, the aerial torpedo; Don Hawkins, who supervised the fleet of planes; Jerry, the clown; Atlas, the strong man; Leo, the lion-tamer; to say



nothing of Baba, the almost human elephant, and a host of others.

"All present an' correct, boss," said Jerry.

Sangster cleared his throat.

"Look here, my children," he said. "Get this—and get it good. To-night's our farewell performance before leaving England on a world tour. We've got to give 'em something that'll make 'em remember us. Folk have forgotten, near enough, that it was Sangster's Circus that bust Chang an' saved the world from being overrun by yellow men. That

was a good boost while it lasted. But it's wearin' out. To-night we're gonna give the folk a jolt—see?"

There was a chorus of assents. Sangster fixed his gaze on the clean-limbed, boyish Dick Derring.

"You're going to put their hearts in their mouths with your trapeze stunts, son."

"I'll do my best," nodded Dick.

"Best!" boomed Hannibal. "If I thought you ever did anything else, I'd fire you here an' now. An' Jerry—you've gotta make 'em laugh, an' if there's a button that ain't busted when the show's over, you're fired, too."

Jerry stood on his head and waggled his legs in the air.

"An' Leo," went on Sangster, running his eye over the crowd in search of the lion-tamer. "Leo! Where the heck is that knock-kneed lion-tamer?"

"Guess he's along with the animals, boss," said Atlas, the strong man. "He's sort of worried about those two lions you bought last week. I heard him say they ought to be sitting up an' begging like kittens now. But—not a hope of it. They—"

The circus boss went red in the face. "Fetch him here! Didn't I order—"

From somewhere outside came a husky shout of rage, in Leo's well-known tones. It was followed by a dull thud . . . another angry shout, clipped off short . . . more thuds . . . and then a chorus of animal cries that drowned all other sounds.

Dick caught Don Hawkins' arm. "Sounds like trouble, old chap. Come on!"

The pair were half way across the ring before the others thought of following. Together they dived into the dark tunnel between two towering tiers of seats and came out into the open. In front of them were the smaller tents, which housed the various animals.

Dick and Don charged into the one from which came the biggest outcry. A swinging lantern dimly illuminated the place, revealing the cages where excited animals paced back and forth behind the bars, snarling and lashing their tails.

Dick flung a quick glance round the shadowy tent. Everything seemed in order. Suddenly, however, from across the tent came an angry, booming shout, and a man rolled from beneath one of the cages. It was Leo, and as he heaved himself to his feet Dick and Don ran to his side. Leo mopped a trickle of blood from his cheek.

"Happened!" he roared. "I caught some dirty

Here they are—THE CIRCUS DAREDEVILS—Top o' The Bill for Thrills, Fun and Adventure. DICK DERRING, The Boy Acrobat. BABA, the Almost-human Elephant.

JERRY, the Clown, and DON HAWKINS.

Meet Them Below in their First Daring Exploit Against THE MENACE OF THE SCARRED HAND!

skunk tamperin' with the cages, and I went for him. But that guy fought more like a wild beast than a man." Leo pointed to his cheek. "He did that—with his teeth. Gosh! A lion's claws weren't sharper than his. Guess he'd have raked my eyes out if you two hadn't butted along."

"And he got away?" breathed Don.

"Sure he did. No!" Leo gave an excited yell. "There he goes!"

There was a sound of ripping canvas. Dick had a momentary glimpse of a powerfully built man diving through a hole he had slashed with a knife. Like a flash, the young acrobat plunged in pursuit.

"Watch your step! That guy—"

Dick did not hear the rest of Leo's warning. He was outside the tent now. Dusk was fast falling. To his left he could just see the dark shadow of the double row of parked planes. In front of him was a wide stretch of grass ending in a road where a few lights showed. A dim figure was ploughing towards the highway—and Dick Derring went in pursuit.

Trained to a hair, in the pink of condition, the young acrobat had all the advantage. He had halved the other's lead by the time the man crashed through the straggly hedge and dropped into the sunken road beyond.

With a spectacular leap, Dick cleared the hedge a few moments later, glimpsed his quarry thirty yards away as he landed in the lane and sped after him. The thirty yards dwindled to twenty—to fifteen—and he saw the fellow clearly, lit up by the powerful headlamps of an overtaking car.

The car flashed past Dick—a rakish, black saloon—and the running man turned his head. For the first time Dick saw his face, every feature limned by the headlamp's glare—and it was a face he was never likely to forget.

Long and narrow, with jet-black hair and red, glittering eyes—lips curled venomously from his teeth, ears long and pointed, lacking lobes like those of an animal.

He snarled wolfishly at Dick, and his hand dropped to his hip as the boy acrobat braced himself for a spring. Something flashed like silver in the white glare of the lamps, when his hand reappeared. A knife!

Dick ducked instinctively, in the nick of time. With a wicked hiss the keen blade sliced past his cheek—even as the car drew level with the thrower.

The rest happened too quickly for Dick to interfere. The nearside door of the car opened. Through it came an arm—Dick remembered afterwards that it was covered in a tight red sleeve—and a hand fastened on the shoulder of the man with the pointed ears. Just for a moment the car slowed down with a squeal of brakes, and in that instant the man was

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whisked bodily from the ground into the car. The door slammed, and with a bellowing roar from its exhaust, the car gathered speed.

Dick took a flying leap at it, hands outstretched to grip the spare wheel. He was a yard short. Before he could gather himself for a second leap, the car was gone, and its tail-light was a dwindling red speck in the distance.

"Hang!" grunted Dick. "The fellow must have had some of his pals knocking around in that car. And—"

He broke off suddenly and stooped to pick up something from the road. Then he drew in a sibilant breath. It was a human hand he held—preserved in some way that gave it the semblance of having been recently hacked from a living person. In the half-light of dusk it looked incredibly gruesome, the more so because of the livid scar incised deeply upon the back of the hand.

"The Scarred Hand again!" jerked Dick. His mind went harking back two years—to those wild days when the Flying Circus had battled with Chang the Mighty and his myrmidons of the Scarred Hand. The Scarred Hand had been smashed—utterly and completely, they had thought. Yet now—there was this . . . a ghastly reminder . . . at once a challenge and a threat. . . .

Death on the Wind.

HE car slashed on through the night. Crouched behind the wheel was a man in a mask—blood-red and moulded to the contour of his face, so that a pair of slit-like eyes was the only visible

feature. At his side was huddled the man with the pointed ears; in the back seats sat two more red-garbed figures, slant-eyed, impassive, yellow.

None of them spoke a word as the car sped on—through the quiet streets of a suburb and then on to a broad highway. Only the purr of the powerful engine and the swish of tyres broke the silence.

Presently, slackening speed, the car swung off the main road into a maze of narrow, winding lanes. For some miles the car wound and twisted before it turned into a long drive bordered with trees that arched overhead like a tunnel; at last it skidded to a standstill before a low, rambling house that loomed up dark and sinister against the night.

Three of the men piled out of the car and climbed a few worn steps to the door of blackened, centuries-old oak. It opened without visible agency—shut again as the men passed through. Now they were in a hall, dimly lit by a hanging lantern—with barbaric hangings and velvety Chinese rugs on the floor. The little furniture—there was of sandalwood and lacquer, clashing oddly with the ancient beams of the ceiling. The sickly scent of incense, reminiscent of the far-off mysteries of the East, hung heavily on the air.

The man with the pointed ears strode across the hall. In that dim light he appeared more wolfish than ever; there was something of the jungle animal in the manner of his furtive, easy movements. His lips were curled back from his teeth in a never-changing snarl, but there was a hint of uneasiness in his red, flaming eyes. . . .

For fear was stirring in the heart of Kung the Killer!

Somewhere in the depths of the house a gong boomed. Hanging curtains slid apart with a soft rustle. Kung alone stepped between them and into the cage of a lift which whirled him downwards into a room more barbarously Eastern than the hall.

A man sat there on a chair of carved ivory. He was slim, his slimmness accentuated by the tight-fitting red suit he wore. His face was masked, and his eyes showed startlingly yellow through the lits in the red stuff. Those eyes blazed with cold fury as Kung entered.

"You failed me, Kung," the seated man hissed in sibilant Chinese. "I sent ye to deal the first blow at this Flying Circus of the foreign devils—to bring hither him of the fair hair and blue eyes, who is named the Aerial Torpedo." The yellow eyes flamed tigerishly. "And ye failed."

Kung let his tongue rove round his lips. "The foreign devils watch well, master," he growled.

The other made an impatient gesture.

"And have ye not eyes also? Are ye not Kung the Killer, the terror of Annam? Is it not your boast that ye can move as warily as a tiger and slay as silently as the serpent? Have ye lost your cunning that ye flee before the hated foreign devil like a village cub from a tiger?"

Kung writhed under his taunts.

"Listen!" The Red Avenger spat the word suddenly. Kung. Ye have failed me once—that I forgive—but see to it that there are no more failures. I have stepped into the shoes of my illustrious father, Chang the Mighty, to conquer where he failed. I have sworn that each and all of the foreign devils in the Flying Circus shall find death at my hands, tasting its horrors a thousand times ere it takes them in its welcome caress. Yet that is but a little part of the Red Avenger's mission. The world shall tremble—"

He jerked himself erect in his ivory chair.

"But—why tell ye this? to-night ye will redeem your failure. Listen." The Red Avenger leaned towards the grovelling Kung. "The foreign devil called Derring shall be the first to die. Here is the manner of it. Yesterday I sat among the foreign devils and watched his folly, as he courted death in the tent-trap. In one of his acts he burst a number of balloons. To-night he will repeat the trick, but, among the balloons, will be one that I have prepared. Ye will see that it is placed among them."

The Avenger's face twisted to an unholy leer.

"A red balloon! Red for death and vengeance," he went on. "But there is a greater matter. In the possession of this foreign devil, Derring, is a jade Buddha, which he took from the ruins of Chang's city. To me it means power—to others, death. You, Kung, will get that jade and bring it here to me."

"There must be no failure," snarled the Red Avenger. "The way will be made easy for ye. But—treat it with care. Ye, Kung, cannot understand, but, contained in that Buddha, are the germs of a pestilence such as has never swept the world before. Also, written upon it, is the secret of the antidote that will make me and my followers immune. And when Death rides upon the wind, the Red Avenger triumphs!"

Terror Let Loose.

THE white blaze of a spotlight played upon Dick Derring's slim figure. He sat perched upon a trapeze in the very peak of the Big Top. It was the moment for his big stunt—the thrill that never failed to bring down the house.

Far below, a blurred sea of upturned faces surrounded the sawdust arena, with all the figures in it looking freakishly dwarfed from that dizzy height—Hannibal Sangster in impeccable evening dress, with a vast expanse of starched shirt-front; Don Hawkins perched on Baba's broad shoulders; Jerry fooling about with a cluster of coloured balloons.

Those balloons, filled with coal-gas, would presently float upward. It was Dick's task to burst all of them with a knife he carried in his hand, before a single balloon touched the canvas roof. That meant a lightning exhibition of acrobatics—stunts that were wholly unrehearsed since nobody could foretell where the air eddies might swing a balloon.

Boom! The big drum crashed. Jerry, pretending to be very startled, tripped over himself, let go of the balloons and then tied himself in knots in an effort to recover them as they sailed into the air.

Like a swooping eagle Dick dived from that topmost trapeze—the spotlight following his flight,



THE BALLOON BOMB.—Dick's knife pierced the last balloon. Instantly there followed a terrific explosion, and the acrobat reeled off the trapeze.

the knife glinting in his hand. *Flop!* One balloon vanished. For a brief instant Dick was clinging to a trapeze with one hand . . . swinging round . . . diving for a second balloon.

That went, too . . . another after it . . . another. Dick was never still a moment, up, down, twisting like an eel, risking death at every dive, but never failing to get one or more of the floating spheres.

Twenty dwindled to ten . . . to five . . . to two. But those two were rocketing to the roof—were high above him. The knife went cross-wise between his teeth, for he needed both hands in that breathless race to the Big Tops. He swung like a pendulum, loosed his hold of the trapeze at the limit of its swing and went somersaulting through the air—locked his ankles round a higher bar and hung for a moment head downwards, before he swept on to the next.

Another leap across space, with the knife in his hand now. A pop—and one balloon left! A red balloon! Red for danger!

But there was no thought of peril in Dick's mind as, like a flash, he streaked after it. Up to the very peak of the tent. It would be touch and go. Now he was on his feet on that topmost bar, and—a cheer broke spontaneously from every throat in the audience as the knife touched the red sphere.

Then, swiftly, the cheer changed to a shriek of horror. As the knife pricked the balloon there was a flash of crimson flame and a report like the bursting of a bomb. Most of the audience thought it was another stunt as they saw Dick fling up an arm to protect his face—saw him hurled from the trapeze and come somersaulting down, arms and legs asprawl. Watching his hurling body, few of them saw that the flame had spread to the canvas—that, already, the Big Top was burning like a torch . . .

Dick bounced, unhurt by his fall, into the safety net. He was blackened and singed by the explosion; but he had missed its full force by throwing himself backward. As he rolled over in the swaying net, all thought of the explosion was driven from his mind. He saw the flaming tent-top and realised that here was the making of a panic. Already, others had seen it; shrieks rang through the tent, and—

Dick saw something else. Coming at a loping trot along the gangway by which the performers entered and left the ring, were two tawny, big-maned creatures.

Lions! The pair of newcomers that Leo had so far found untameable! And they were loose—gained the arena—unnoticed, since every eye was on the flaming tent-top. . . .

A panicky shout brought the brutes to a halt, bewildered and a little scared by the din. Suddenly somebody caught sight of them, and loosed a fearful yell of horror. One of the lions gave a booming roar and started to run.

Terror was let loose then. Men leapt to their feet, scrambled over seats, crazed with fear, stampeding for the exits. There were yells, shrieks, cries, the crash of splintering wood.

And the lions—one bound would have carried them among the panic-stricken mob.

But Dick had acted, even as the glimmer of a plan flashed into his mind. Nobody saw him claw his way across the safety-net, slashing at the meshes with his knife. Nobody, a moment later, could possibly see him, for, of a sudden, every light in the tent went out. . . .

Darkness descended, made denser by the smoke that swirled downward, magnifying the terror a thousandfold.

Dick hacked away at the net. He could see nothing of the lions now, but another ear-shattering roar sounded just beneath him. Then he and the net were falling together.

Thud! With muscles loose to take the shock, he hit the ground, sprawled headlong in the sawdust and in a moment was on his feet, barely shaken. To his left a savage outcry rose above the din of shouts. One lion, as he had hoped might happen, was enveloped in the fallen net.

The ruddy glare of fire leapt brighter, and Dick heard a low, savage snarl behind him.

Like lightning he whirled. The second brute was not six yards away, its belly flattened to the sawdust, its tail lashing the air in angry jerks. Its red, glinting eyes were upon him. Like an unleashed spring the lion leapt.

Anybody less agile than the young acrobat would have gone down under its slashing paws. As it was, its razor-edged claws brushed his shoulders, and he only saved himself by a miracle of speed. Round he whirled, leaping, at the same time, clean upon the brute's back. One hand gripped its shaggy mane, the other drove the knife to the hilt between its shoulders.

Of the next few moments Dick retained only the foggiest impressions. The great jungle cat was crazy with pain and terror. It leapt into the air, and Dick found himself on the sawdust with the wounded animal above him.

He thought his last moment had come. A steel-tipped paw missed him by a hair's breadth; a gust of hot, fetid breath drove sickeningly into his face; he saw snarling jaws, seeming in the fire-glare to drip blood . . .

And then the miracle happened. Something whipped down from above like a striking snake. Dick saw it encircle the lion's body—saw the brute picked from the ground as if it had been a kitten—realised that the snake-like something was the trunk of Baba the elephant.

For a moment the snarling, spitting lion was held in mid-air. Then it was smashed back to the sawdust and, as it writhed there, Baba knelt upon it, crushing out its life. From the elephant's back Don Hawkins slithered down and ran to give his pal a hand.

Meanwhile, the rest of the circus troupe had been battling valiantly to quell the rising panic. By flinging wide all the exits and tearing down parts of the canvas wall, they enabled the mob to gain the open. Others had attacked the flames with chemical extinguishers, and in a short time the peril was past.

Dick and Don found themselves under the stars. A mechanic came their way.

"Where's the boss?" he asked them. "There's been dirty work. The main cable has been cut."

Dick looked at his pal. "The Scared Hand?" he breathed. "And—"

A sudden, ear-splitting racket broke in upon his words. Almost as the pals realised that it came from an aero-engine, they saw one of the parked planes move bumpily forward.

"Gosh!" jerked Dick. "And they've pinched a 'bus! Our 'bus!"

* * * * *

"THE Scared Hand, eh?" Hannibal Sangster ground out the words as he paced the floor of his canvas "office." "And the skunks have declared war on the Flying Circus." He stopped opposite Dick and Don, who were the other occupants of the tent, and smacked a beefy fist into the palm of his hand. "War! Well, we'll fight 'em to the last ditch. We've licked 'em once, an' we'll do it again."

The youngsters nodded approval. It was four hours later—half-past one in the morning—and for the circus hands, they had been four hours of strenuous work. Fortunately, there had been no loss of life, though injuries needing treatment had been numerous and the material damage large.

"The first round goes to the Scared Hand," growled Sangster. "I'd like to know who their boss is. Can't be Chang—we saw him blown to smithereens. Anyhow, seems there's a pretty big gang—and we've got to bust it."

"Sure," nodded Don. "Anyhow, the police'll be looking for the merchant with the pointed ears, and—"

Ting-a-ling-ling! The insistent ringing of the telephone cut into his words; Sangster picked up the instrument.

"Yes. Sangster speaking. What's that?" He listened with gleaming eyes. Then he slammed down the receiver and turned to the boys.

"The police," he said elatedly. "They've found the plane. It's come down at a place called Bigham Magna, thirty miles from here, and has been abandoned. Looks like they had engine trouble, though the police say it's undamaged. Anyhow, you boys had better slip along to claim it. Take the Bentley—"

"Right-ho!" said Dick, making for the door.

Sangster checked him—held out a snub-nosed automatic.

"Better take this, son. I should hate you to run up against the Scarred Hand unarmed."

Dick frowned thoughtfully. "Seems as if somebody was looking for something, but—"

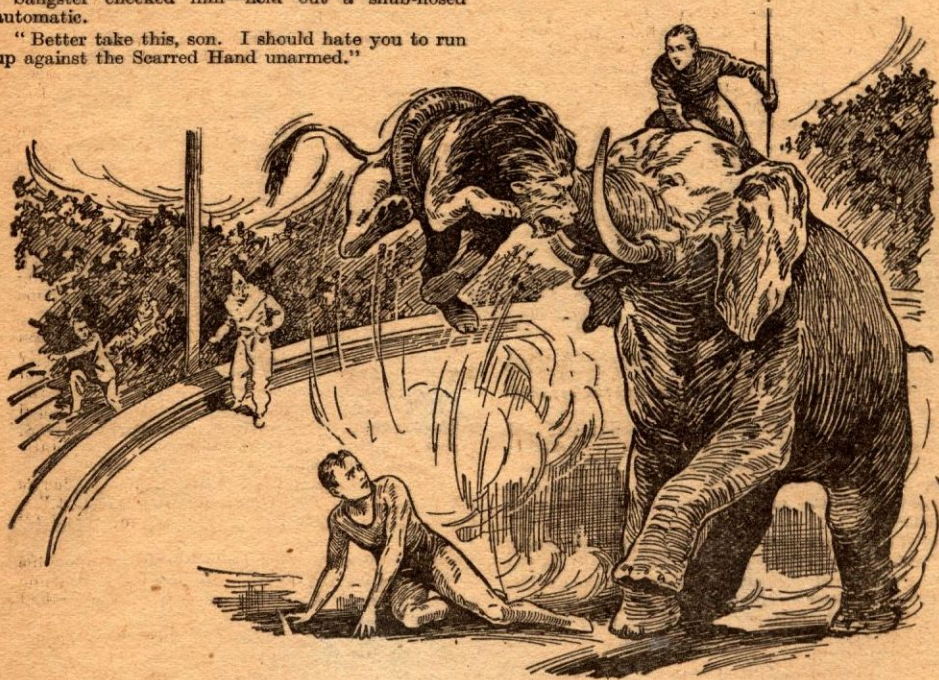
The word ended in a gasp. He was looking toward the cabin window. Pressed to the glass was a face—blood-red, with slit-like eyes. It vanished in a flash, but, to convince Dick that it was no dream, the glass was suddenly shattered by a blow.

"Look out!"

As he yelled the warning, something came flying through the broken glass. It was a wicked-looking Chinese dagger that whistled between them as they hurried themselves apart, and stuck quivering in the plywood wall.

And it pinned there a fluttering strip of paper, on which was a short message, signed in large capitals:

THE RED AVENGER.



ROBBED OF ITS PREY.—The lion was about to tear Dick to pieces when it was suddenly whipped into the air. Baba, the elephant, had come to the rescue.

Within half-an-hour they reached the sleepy hamlet of Bigham Magna, and located the plane in a field beside a wood. A stolid country constable was in charge of it, having discovered the abandoned machine when cycling on his beat.

Don scrutinised the airplane. There was no external damage, and a healthy roar came from the engines at the first attempt to start them. Nothing wrong there! They went inside, making their way to the cabin they shared.

In the doorway they stopped dead. The place looked as if it had been swept by a cyclone. Papers, clothing, drawers were scattered on the floor.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Don.

The Trap.

DICK snatched the paper from the wall. In the same movement he slipped the gun—Sangster's parting gift—across to Don, with a curt instruction to keep an eye on the porthole. Then at a glance he read the printed words.

Surrender the Jade Buddha you stole from Chang's city. Throw it from the porthole now, or beware.

THE RED AVENGER.

Dick's jaw tightened, and he passed the paper across to Don.

"So that's what they were after," Don murmured. "I remember the thing—sort of souvenir. Didn't"

(Continued on page 30.)

WASHINGTON HAYSEED
DARKIE DETECTIVE!

This Week Our Comical Coon Sleuth solves the
Mystery of the Man with the Bent Tophat!

THE TAME TECS BUST UP!



WHEN SLEUTHS FALL OUT!

Trouble in the Camp of Hayseed and Buskit leads to More Chuckles and Gasps.

"A H'M tell'n yo', Ah'm shuha gonna put mah foot down wid a firm hand!" roared Washington Hayseed. "Yo's allus give'n yo'self half-holidays! If yo's a partner in dis yar business infirmery yo's gotta tend to it, an' give me a day off sometimes!"

The darkie detective scowled fiercely at young Tim Buskit, his alleged assistant. That youth, as the junior member of the firm of Hayseed & Buskit, should have wilted at this evidence of Washington's displeasure; but he merely cocked his head on one side and uttered that infuriating remark:

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!" roared Washington. "Ever since yo' become a football fan yo' bin neglectin' de business to go an' see matches. Now de cricket season's come—yo's become an enrustiat a' dat sport! Ah ain't gonna stand for it! No, Ah ain't!"

"See, here," Tim said. "Don't I work hard enough when we've got a case on? Who does all the thinkin'? Why, me! Who's the genius behind this here detective organisation? Me! See here, Wash, t'ain't grateful of you to start crack'n on about a little thing like a day off!"

Washington almost staggered at the audacity of Tim's remark.

"So yo's de brain's a' de org'nisation, huh? Well, see yar young feller mah lad, let me tell yo' dat if Ah was to dissolve partnership right now yo'd find out yo' mistake! It'm me what's put us where we is to-day!"

"All right!" said Tim Buskit, suddenly fierce.

"If you think that, we'll dissolve partnership and put your words to the test!"

"All right!" echoed Wash. "We will!"

He was a little hazy as to the correct procedure when dissolving partnership, but the nimble-minded Tim started at once to chalk a line across the office floor.

"Say! What's dat for?"

"Divide up the office! Half of this here office belongs to me. Ain't that so?"

"Ah s'pose so—but which half?"

"We'll toss up to decide that." Tim took a coin out of his pocket, spun it in the air and caught it.

"What is it? Winner has first pick."

"Tails!" said Washington.

Tim revealed the coin. It was head side uppermost. "I win," he said, "an' I get the choice of whichever side of the office I like. You agree?"

"Shuha," said Wash, deciding that this arrangement must be fair enough. "Okay, take yo' pick."

"I'll have this half," said Tim, pointing to the side of the chalked line which included the only door to the office. "We'll conduct our business separately, an' then we can see who gets the most clients and settle the argument about who's the more important member of the firm!"

"Okay!" agreed Wash.

He took one of the soap-boxes which served as chairs, and sat himself in the geometrical centre of the area apportioned to him.

For some time, Washington sat twiddling his thumbs, wondering who would be first to get a client. Then it struck him that he was not obliged, after all,

to wait until a client called. Why not go out and find one?

Washington grinned to himself at this evidence of his own superior ingenuity. He rose and walked towards the door.

"Hey!" shouted Tim sternly as Wash's foot crossed the chalked line. "Get out of my office! You're trespassin'!"

"What! See yar, young feller. Ah's gotta right to go out, ain't Ah?"

"Not through my office door! You get on your own side of the line!"

Washington stopped in amazement. Tim gave a furtive grin.

"Now, Mr. Washington Hayseed, will you admit that I got the superior brains?"

Washington Hayseed glared. "Say! Yo' thinks yo'self a smart guy, Tim Buskit, don't yo'? Well, yo' ain't beaten dis guy!"

With that remark, Washington stalked back into his own area of the office and threw open the window which was on his side. He poked his head out, took a deep breath and swung himself out on the window sill. Tim Buskit hurried over to the window in surprise.

"Hey! Wait a minute, Wash. Don't—"

"Kindly don't trespass on my office, sah!" bawled Wash from his precarious position on the sill.

Tim Buskit shrugged his shoulders and stepped back over the chalked line.

"As you like. Anyhow, you won't find it so easy to get back that way."

Washington didn't reply, for all his attention was occupied in the difficult process of sliding down a none-to-firm drainpipe on to a roof below.

Tim watched his late partner's dusky head disappear below the level of the window sill, and waited with apprehension for the crash, but as no sound came, save a confused scrambling noise, Tim sat down again thoughtfully. Perhaps, after all, he had been too easy-going about taking half-holidays as Wash pointed out. Washington and Tim rarely quarrelled and now that his dusky pal had gone Tim began to feel regrets. After all, he had better stay in the office, in case a client called.

Tim's Capture.

AND so Tim did not give himself the disputed half-holiday whence all the argument had ensued. Instead, he remained in the office, reading a hefty tome called "Crime and Criminals."

Half-an-hour passed, and then Tim was disturbed by a resumption of the scrambling noise from the direction of the open window.

"Coming back the same way," grinned Tim to himself.

Tim glanced up to see a dark face appear over the edge of the window sill. At a casual glance, all dusky faces appear much alike, and Tim was not expecting any other coloured gent to visit the office via the window. After the first swift glance Tim pretended to be intent on his book. He heard a bag being dumped over the window sill, then followed its dusky owner.

"Stick 'em up!" said a voice that was not at all like Washington's.

Tim nearly jumped out of his clothes. He turned round to find an unpleasant-looking negro standing before him with an outstretched revolver. Instinct guided Tim's arms above his head.

"Which is de way outer dis blamed place?" grunted the nigger. "I gotta make a quick getaway!"

Tim certainly had brains enough to recognise this unfriendly, coloured gent for what he was. A hold-up man! Tim deduced that he had just committed a robbery and made his escape over the housetops. The open window of the office had offered a way down to earth.

Tim pointed a tremulous finger of his upraised hand towards the door,



PUTTING THE LID ON IT.—Thinking his foot was on the ground, Washington let his whole weight fall on it. Goldschmitt let out a yell as his hat was pushed over his eyes.

"Th-th-that way, s-sir," he said, simulating a nervousness that was not entirely absent.

Fearing nothing from this apparently terrified youth the nigger lowered his gun and strode towards the door. Tim saw his chance. He flung himself bodily at the retreating nigger.

Thud! They struck the floor together with a

force that made the rickety walls tremble. But the nigger was lowermost and provided an excellent shock-absorber for Tim.

He was temporarily too dazed and surprised to resist Tim as the youngster wrenched the revolver from his grasp, and then, being in receipt of the butt of same on his headpiece he lost interest entirely in the rest of the procedure.

Tim rose to his feet, grinning with triumph. He picked up the nigger's bag and opened it, to reveal a bundle of expensive jewels and gems.

"Phew! Must have robbed a jeweller's shop!" Tim whistled.

He ran to the window and looked out across the roofs. A sky-sign on a near-by roof caught his eye instantly: *Goldschmitt & Co., High-Class Jewellers.*

"That's it! He's bin an' robbed that place an' escaped through the fanlight on to the roof!"

Washington Steps On It.

AS Washington scrambled down the drainpipe on to the roof below, he was annoyed. Mainly, he was annoyed because Tim had shown superior cunning in selecting the half of the office nearest the door, but he was also angered because he could see that getting to street level by this route was going to be difficult.

However, he managed the first part of the journey, down the drainpipe, without mishap and landed on the flat roof below. Here, he saw to his joy, that a slightly lower roof adjoined this building, and against it was a small shed, whence it was an easy drop into a backyard at ground level. Washington became more cheerful.

It was not difficult to drop on to the lower roof, and to climb from there on to the top of the shed was child's play. True, Washington inadvertently put his foot through the roof of the shed by stepping on a rotten place, but as the owner did not appear to voice his disapproval, Washington did not worry much about that.

Washington Hayseed dropped into the unknown backyard and looked round. The place was bounded on one side by a reasonably high brick wall. The sounds of traffic on the other side of it showed that that way lay the street and freedom. Washington smiled triumphantly.

"Dat young Tim ain't so smart as he t'inks! Ah'll show him!"

Woof! Woof! Woofwoofwoofwoof! Washington sprang round and looked behind him in horror. Rushing towards him from the other direction, came a large, hairy dog, and there was something in its manner that hinted of disapproval. Washington dived for the wall as if pursued by a fiend. The dog hurtled up swiftly in the rear, selected a portion of his trouser-leg and tore it violently with its teeth.

Washington discovered he was capable of an unsuspected nimbleness. His hands clawed the top of the wall and he had hauled himself up on to it with lightning rapidity. The dog commenced to bark wildly and spring up towards the dangling legs of our coon sleuth with obvious intent to inflict further damage thereon.

"Gosh! Ah guess Ah ain't welcome round dese parts!" said Washington, swinging his legs over the side of the wall.

Alas! As the sage has said, misfortunes rarely come singly. Mr. Goldschmitt, of Goldschmitt & Co., High-Class Jewellers, chanced to be walking along that street on the other side of the wall, en route for business. Perhaps things would not have been so bad had not Mr. Goldschmitt, in common with high-

class jewellers the world over, affected an expensive, silken topper during business hours.

As he passed beneath the wall, Washington's boot, searching for a foothold, settled on the top of Mr. Goldschmitt's splendid tall hat, and as Washington could not see, he naturally thought his foot was on the ground. He let his whole weight fall on that foot, and Mr. Goldschmitt's topper descended with a crunch over its owner's ears and eyes.

Washington gave a wild yell as he discovered the ground beneath him apparently in a state of eruption, and descended in a heap on top of Mr. Goldschmitt.

When the stars had cleared away Wash discovered himself inexplicably entangled with a portly gent whose crushed topper had somehow become forced over his eyes and nose. The gent was groping round wildly and yelling: "Vat iss it I'm at! Help! Police! Murder!"

"Gosh!" gulped Washington, scrambling up. "Ah musta trod on his hat! All right, sah! Ah'll get yo' out of it!"

Washington grabbed the rim of the topper and with a hefty heave, wrenched it off, bringing away certain portions of Mr. Goldschmitt's curly locks and perceptibly flattening his Semitic nose.

"Sorry, sah," apologised Wash. "Ah accidentally stepped on yo' head when Ah was climb'n over dat wall!"

"You step on my head! Ahhhhhhhhhhh!! I vas summons you! You attack me! Police! Vere's my hat!"

"Here yar, sah," said Washington picking up the battered remains of Mr. Goldschmitt's topper and handing it to him.

When Mr. Goldschmitt saw his beautiful topper (what was!) he seemed on the verge of a fit.

"My hat! My peautiful hat—vat cost two guineas—made price! I haf you arrested! Police! Help! I—"

Washington didn't remain to hear the rest of Mr. Goldschmitt's lament, but discreetly withdrew round the corner.

Wash Wins Through.

ANOTHER shock was waiting for poor Mr. Goldschmitt when at last he arrived at his shop. One of the assistants, in a high state of excitement, met him at the door.

"Mr. Goldschmitt! A terrible thing has happened! The shop's been robbed!"

"Robbed!!!" screamed Mr. Goldschmitt.

"Yessir! Robbed! A man rushed in and held us all up at the point of a revolver and took nearly two thousand pounds worth of jewellery! He was a nigger! He escaped through the fanlight and got away over the roofs of the houses!"

"A nigger!!!" Mr. Goldschmitt shrieked on the point of expiring completely. "I saw him! He jumped over a wall at der back and ruined my peautiful hat! Vat do I! Vat am I at! Der Police! A detectif! Ve must haf a vitnes for der insurance!"

"We sent for the police, sir, but if you want a detective there's a firm of private ones just round the corner. Man named Washington Hayseed, I think!"

"Get him! Send for all der detectifs you can find! Oh! Oh! Vat am I at!"

The assistant rushed out of the shop in search of a detective. This assistant fortunately knew Washington Hayseed by sight.

He had no sooner run ten yards along the street



A DOWN ON THE DARKIE.—The nigger hold-up man turned to go. Instantly Tim hurled himself bodily at the crook, bringing him down on his face.

than Washington himself came into sight. After Washington's encounter and hurried departure from Mr. Goldschmitt he had heard there was some excitement at the jewellers and was on his way to see if there was a job for a detective there.

"Oh, Mister Hayseed! You're the very man we want! Our shop's robbed!"

"Keep calm, sah!" said Washington putting on his best detective manner. "Ah'll see to it!"

Washington hurried along beside the agitated assistant, thinking meanwhile that he had at last scored a triumph over Tim by getting the first client. They entered the shop. Mr. Goldschmitt was gesticulating wildly to the policeman who had arrived on the scene, and saying "I tell you I see him!"

"Here's Mr. Hayseed, sir," said the assistant who had accompanied Washington.

Mr. Goldschmitt turned round. He and Washington gave a yell of dismay simultaneously.

"Dat vas him! I saw him escape over der wall! He ruined my hat—my beautiful hat! Grab him!"

Washington attempted to turn tail and fly, but Mr. Goldschmitt threw himself bodily at him as he did so.

"There's some mistake, sir!" the assistant started. "This is Mr. Hayseed, the—"

"He vas der thief," yelled Goldschmitt, struggling with Washington. "He climbed der wall and ruined my peaut—"

"Ere! Let's sort this out!" said the policeman who was present, separating the struggling couple, but retaining a firm grip on Washington's shoulder.

"Ah ain't no thief," gasped Washington, who

indeed had thought that Mr. Goldschmitt was seeking reprisals for his ruined topper. "Ah's Washin'ton Hayseed, de detective."

"Was you seen escapin' over a wall at the back of this 'ere buildin' or wasn't you?" the policeman questioned.

"Shuha, but—"

"Well, that's evidence enough, I reckon. These fellers say the thief was a nigger an'—"

"Hold on a minute," said the voice of Tim Buskit in the rear. "What's all this about?"

They all turned to see Tim, accompanied by two policemen holding a dazed negro between them. Tim held a bag containing the stolen jewels.

"It's all right," said Tim. "I've got the real thief here. He tried to escape through the window of our office, and I collared him. I guessed it was your shop he'd robbed and brought him along. What're you doin' here, Wash?"

But that explanation took a long time and the reader knows all about it. Sufficient to say that as Washington and Tim walked back to their office again the following remarks were made:

"Well, Wash. Who d'you think's the brains of the concern now?"

"Me."

"You! Why, didn't I catch the thief?"

"Shuha, but dat was only a minor event, Ah guess. It was me dat left de winder open for him to get in!" And so the argument was never satisfactorily settled.

The second part of the B.M. Amateur Detective Outfits FREE next week. Order your copy of the Mag, early and make sure of the Mystery Message-Maker.

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. Brame 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. Billy and Fritz became embroiled in a revolution, from which they were saved by a Sergeant Zweger. Billy, however, fell into the hands of one of the Master of Masks' men, who took him to the Schloss of Stahnfeld.

The Rat.

THE narrow passage between the dungeons terminated at an iron gate, which Billy's guide unlocked and relocked after him. Once more they climbed stone steps.

Billy was feeling the effects of it all, despite his sleep at the police station. There were hundreds of steps, and now and again they came on a stone seat let into the wall. They rested on each of these seats in that long climb.

At last they were confronted by a massive door, and, this unlocked, they stepped into the castle proper, going through a short passageway and so at last to a wide entrance hall. This hall was sedate with tasteful furnishings, and the sunshine struck through stained glass windows above its outer doorway.

Billy's escort took him into a small room, rang a bell and spoke to the man who answered it in Lithkranian. This man hurried away and came back in a few minutes. Billy's escort said: "Come on." Evidently somebody had intimated that he would see them at once. More passageways, rich and luxurious, quiet, and another room, much larger than the one in which they had visited.

It looked down on the river and right across the wild and picturesque country beyond. The view from its windows was as splendid as any Billy had seen. Its walls were hung with rich and wonderful tapestries, and fine rugs were spread on its highly polished oaken floor.

In the middle of it, facing towards the window, was an ebony desk, behind which was seated a man in uniform. The uniform was very gay and gorgeous, and it made the man at the desk look even more handsome than he really was—and he was handsome enough in all conscience; a fine, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped fellow, with black hair brushed back from a hard and ruthless face in which grey eyes were startlingly light and clear.

And . . . somehow . . . Billy felt that that face was familiar.

"Here is the boy, Your Majesty," said Billy's escort.

Billy started. This was Adolf, King of Lithkrania, one of the most ambitious and powerful monarchs in Europe!

Adolf the Third looked him over slowly; then said: "Come here, boy. Stand on the other side of this desk and let the light from the window fall on your face."

Billy obeyed, and Adolf scanned his features closely.

"H'm. I want to ask you a few questions." Even in the throbbing and bewildered excitement of those moments Billy realised that he spoke in the accents of a cultured Englishman. He had been educated at Eton and Oxford. The chill grey eyes were examining him still.

"Your name, I believe, is Trent?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"William Trent . . . William . . . Lived in Nottingham, eh?"

"Yes, Your Majesty." Billy remembered Sergeant Ernst Zweger's catechism. This was much of a muchness with it.

"With a Miss Ann Lessiter?"

There was no help for it. Billy could not lie in the face of this, despite Sergeant Zweger's warning.

"She was my aunt, Your Majesty."

The grey eyes hardened, gleamed with sardonic satisfaction.

"I see. She died and you came to London alone." He referred to a memorandum book on the ebony desk and named a date. "That is right, eh?"

Billy agreed. They knew a lot about him.

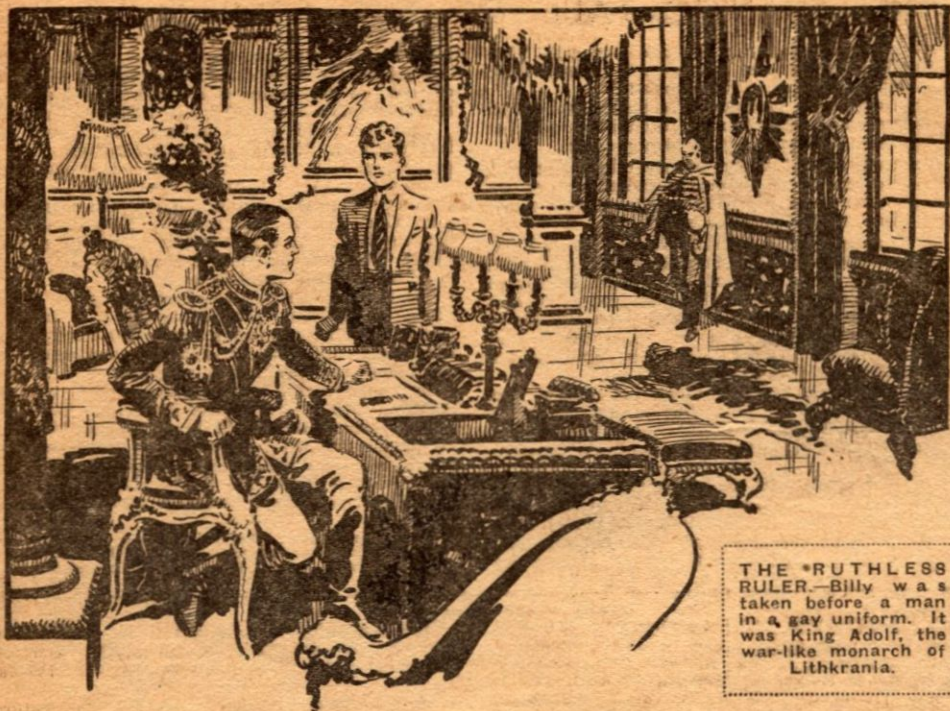
"You lodged with some Italian people, and you became very friendly with them. Yes, I see. Well, you've given us a great deal of trouble, your man. By the way, there is a man called Brame Sentence. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing, except that he was very kind to me."

"Are you sure you know nothing?"

Billy lied stoutly. "I don't think there is much to know, Your Majesty. Mr. Sentence struck me as being just a rich young gentleman with very little to do."

"Is that so? Well, you may be right. I want you to come with me." Adolf glanced at the man who had brought Billy into the room and who, all this



THE "RUTHLESS RULER.—Billy was taken before a man in a gay uniform. It was King Adolf, the war-like monarch of Lithkrania.

time, had stood stiffly at attention near the door. "All right, Schlekker. You have done well."

Schlekker murmured thanks, bowed stiffly, and backed out of the room through the open door. Adolf stood up, six-foot-one of lean bone and sinew, a splendid figure in his gay uniform. "You will come with me," he said. "And, incidentally, I want to warn you. Any effort on your part to escape from this castle will result in your death. Though you may not be aware of it, you will be watched; and those watchers will have orders to be absolutely merciless if it be necessary. You quite understand?"

He spoke casually, but Billy had a vision of something implacable, inevitable, behind his nonchalance.

They went along more passages and at last they came to that great and wonderful hall of the castle of which something was written in an earlier part of this chronicle—that hall wherein was suspended from the great crossbeams . . . the Rat Trap.

Billy stood and stared at it; stared at the man who crouched in it, who came to its bars, seizing them and staring down on him.

Adolf called: "Karl, I have brought somebody for you to look at . . . and study . . . and remember."

And the man in the Rat Trap, after a long and hungry stare at Billy, a few moments during which, incredibly, Billy knew that he had seen that man before, uttered a loud, wild cry and slid senseless to the floor of his awful prison.

Fritz to the Rescue.

WHEN the bridge was smashed by the heavy shell and the motor-boat was driven beneath the surface of the river, Fritz, like Billy, lost sight of his companions. It took a lot to kill Fritz,

and he came to the surface of the river in due course, completely unharmed and swimming powerfully.

Unlike Billy, he swam ashore as quickly as he could. He effected his landing on some steps which were terminated by a narrow alley diving between two riverside warehouses, and through this alley went Fritz.

Dripping wet, he was also very cold and uncomfortable, and he realized that his first task must be to secure dry clothing. This, under the circumstances then ruling in Stahnfeld, was very easy. Shops were closed or deserted, and Fritz was able to take his pick of men's outfitting establishments in the waterside district.

They were not classy shops, but Fritz did not trouble about that. He found one which had a big placard in its window bearing the legend: "Snob English Suits. English Spoken."

He fitted himself out with new underpants and vest, socks and a marvellous pair of boots with light kid uppers and pearl buttons, and then selected a shirt, the general background of which was green and the relief motif blue and yellow in stripes. One suit particularly attracted his attention. It was a black and white check of a type that hit the eye like a bludgeon. Fritz put it on.

There were discrepancies about that suit. The trouser legs and jacket sleeves were an inch or two short. It had been made for a short, stout man. It fitted well all round, but displayed nervousness at its extremities. Fritz found a wing collar, a pink and scarlet ready-made bow and a bowler hat, with a wide curly brim, and sallied forth into the heart of the revolution.

Fritz at once set out in search of the Riverside House. It was, he reckoned, his one chance of finding the boy who had been his companion through

so many perils and whom he had come to love so much.

He swung a corner and ran into a crowd. They were all mad drunk and out for loot. One of them saw Fritz and yelled: "Bourgeois!"

Fritz waited for no more. He turned and bolted and they came yelling after him, brandishing weapons of all kinds, from table legs to cavalry sabres.

The chase took Fritz through several alleys, during which the mob of his pursuers increased, and at last brought him to a fairly wide and dingy road of the type often found near dock sides.

A cavalryman was ambling down this road, his sword at the slope. The horse saw Fritz and shied on the spot. Fritz, his bowler hat jammed firmly on his head, made a dash at the horse and as it came down he put his massive hands round the ankle of its rider and heaved him off. The cavalryman clattered to the ground, and Fritz, grabbing his sabre, clambered into the saddle.

Now Fritz was no great horseman and he was hardly dressed for the part. But he wrapped his big legs round that horse's middle, clutched the hilt of the sabre firmly in his bone-crushing fist and let the horse go.

He never carried with him afterwards a real picture of that ride. The horse was an extraordinarily uncomfortable animal, he found. A sea of faces seemed to lurch and sway and gibber beneath him. He slashed right and left with the sabre and every

time he did so he nearly slipped off. His left hand fingers were dug into the thick mane, and they, plus his knee grip, kept him on board.

Suddenly the sword ceased to hit things. The yells of rage and pain ceased to resound. The horse was stretched down to it, going like a Derby winner.

Fritz tucked his sword under his left armpit and looked round. The crowd was behind him. Three prone figures lay in the street, never to move again. The fight was over. Fritz was the winner.

The problem that now confronted him was three-fold. One—how to stop the horse. Two—if he could not stop it, how to get off it without breaking something. Three—if he could neither stop nor get off it, where would it take him?

The horse apparently knew exactly where it was going. It streaked up a further street, it turned a corner, and ran into more looters, sailors among them. The spectacle of a large ex-Prussian guardsman, in a check suit and bowler hat, mounted on a cavalry charger and waving a sword, momentarily checked the revolution in that part of Stahlfeld; but Fritz was gone before they could do anything to him.

Suddenly it dawned on Fritz. The horse was going home, as a horse will when left to itself; and that home, with a horse like this, must be a cavalry barracks. His forehead became wet at the thought.

Helpless on a horse! Can Fritz stop it or change its course before he is carried among his enemies? Gripping incidents in next week's episodes.

DOOM TO THE FLYING CIRCUS

(Continued from page 23.)

look worth a heap to me. But—going to hand it over?"

"Not likely." Dick was thinking hard. He went on in a whisper that carried no farther than Don's ears. "Fact is—I gave the thing away weeks ago. But—listen. We've got to find out who the Red Avenger is, and here's our chance."

He tapped the paper.

"This says we're to throw the Buddha from the porthole. So there must be somebody out there waiting to receive it. Here's the wheeze." He flicked off the electric light as he spoke. "You'll oblige by throwing any old thing through the porthole two minutes' from now. That'll just give me time to get outside and snaffle the blighter as he picks it up. Can do?"

"Sure! But—"

Dick, however, was gone. As silent as a wraith he swung himself down from the plane and, hugging the shadow of the huge machine, crept towards the spot where he reckoned the emissary of the Red Avenger would be waiting.

And then his plan came unstuck. A scream rang on the night—ending suddenly in a gurgling sob and the thud of a falling body.

In a flash Dick realised what had happened. The constable had heard the crash of the breaking window, had gone to investigate—and had gone to his death! And his killer was there, only a dozen yards away.

Flinging caution to the winds, Dick leapt forward. He saw a dim figure rising from the ground—a figure too slightly built to be the constable. Dick went for him with both arms working.

Luck was against him, however. He tripped over the sprawling body of the constable and dropped to his hands and knees. By the time he recovered his feet, the killer was in full flight, making for the road.

Dick went after him. But the man had a good start, and he ran like a trained athlete. He had lost none of his lead when he gained the hedge bordering the road. As he disappeared, there came the whirr of a self-starter, the roar of an engine, and Dick reached the hedge in time to see a low, sleek car lurching from the shelter of the bushes.

This time, however, Dick was making no mistakes. He cleared the hedge in a bound and, as if shod with springs, leapt again the instant his toes touched the road. His fingers touched the back of the moving car, hooked over the spare wheel; then he was clinging tight as the car gathered speed.

He was still there when, some twenty minutes later, the car ran along a tree-bordered drive.

Then came the squeal of brakes. In a flash Dick dropped from his perch and made a dive for a clump of bushes. He was crouching there when three men—dim, shadowy figures in the darkness—ran from the car to the house. The door closed behind them with a silence that was eerie.

Dick prowled around, and so he discovered a window that was unlatched. His heart thumped madly as he opened it. Darkness—silence within.

He dropped silently into the room beyond, and on tip-toe stole forward. Three paces—four! A pause to listen, and then—

The lights flashed on, Dick caught his breath as he blinked in that sudden dazzle. To right and left red-garbed men lined the walls; there were more at his back, cutting off his retreat. Facing him on the fourth side of the room was a single, sinister figure, red-masked, with yellow eyes that lit up evilly as they met Dick's.

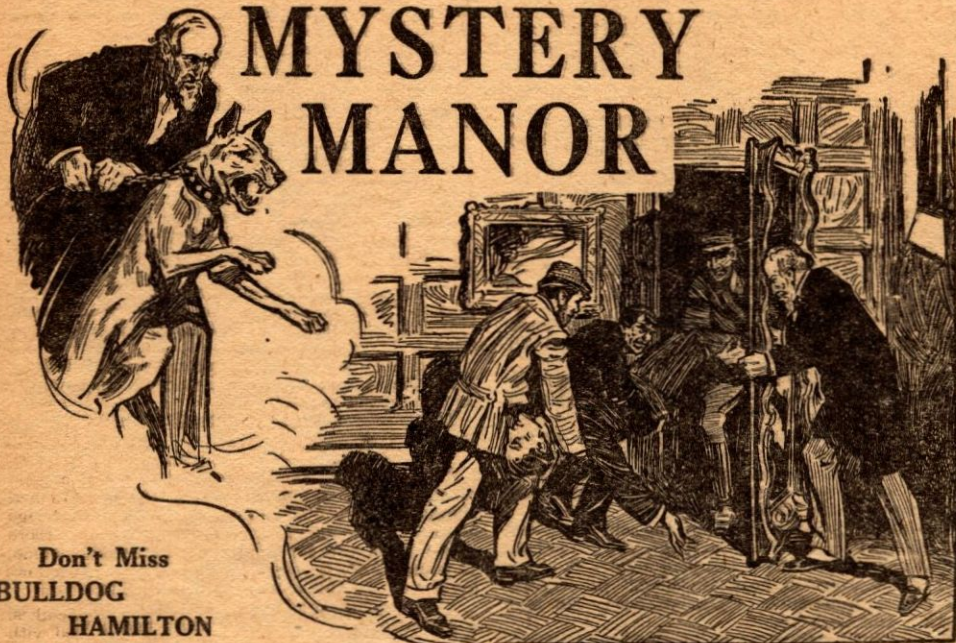
The Red Avenger!

Into the Red Avenger's trap! Surrounded by enemies, how can Dick get free? What terrible end is in store for him? Look out for thrills galore next week.

BIG THRILL LIBRARY SECTION.

Another Exciting Exploit of **BULLDOG HAMILTON**, The Most Daring Detective in Fiction.

**MYSTERY
MANOR**



Don't Miss
**BULLDOG
HAMILTON**

Mystery Manor.

MR. BULMER HAMILTON—known throughout two continents as Bulldog Hamilton, Adventurer—was enjoying a rest cure in rural Sussex. He had secured comfortable rooms at the quaint old Chequers Inn, in the sleepy village of Mystley, and for two days he had given himself over to the joys of fishing.

He sat now, in the dusk of the warm spring evening, on the river bank—a silent, motionless figure. With characteristic abruptness he removed the huge briar pipe, that had been firmly gripped between his teeth, and shrugged his square shoulders.

"Afraid we won't get that big fellow to-night, Bob," he said, in his short, staccato way. "Better be packing up."

"You've had a jolly good day, sir," said Bob Wallace, the cheery-faced young son of the landlord.

"Not bad," admitted Bulldog. "You run along to the inn, boy, and get your mother to cook some of that fish. I'll have one more shot at this gentleman in the pool."

Bob, who knew better than to argue with the big man, shouldered the well-filled basket, and hurried away. It was a mile to the village, along a narrow, winding lane, with fair meadows on one side, and dense woodland on the other.

Darkness was rapidly falling now and deep shadows filled the high trees. A sharp, shrill cry of anguish brought Bob Wallace to a halt, his scalp tingling with apprehension.

"No, no!" sobbed the voice. "You're hurting me . . . Oh, you brute! Help! Help!"

There followed the deeper tones of a man, then came the thwack of a striking stick, and the first voice rose to a scream of agony. With one leap, Bob cleared the grassy bank, dropping the basket at the same time. He plunged through the undergrowth into a little clearing. A roughly dressed man, apparently a tramp, was unmercifully thrashing a small boy—a mere child—with a stout ash-stick.

"You brute!" cried Bob indignantly.

The man swung round abruptly at the sound of Bob's approach. Before the youngster could attack, a second man appeared like magic from a neighbouring bush, and laid hold of Bob from the rear.

"O.K.," grinned the man. "It worked like a dream, Steve."

Before the startled Bob could make an outcry a dirty scarf was whipped round his face, and drawn tight, while his arms were securely roped to his sides. The "child" had turned now, so that Bob could see his face; he was an evil, hideous-featured dwarf, hairy and ugly!

"He, he, he!" he cackled. "We maka da nice trick, eh?"

"Shut your trap, Beppo!" grunted Steve. "Come on, kid—all set!"

Bob was placed between the two men, and forced forward. He was helpless.

"We've got the kid—and we'll make that blamed Bulldog clear out of the district," said Steve, as they penetrated the wood.

"You said it," growled the other man.

Bob began to understand. The attack was just a trick to strike at Bulldog Hamilton.

They reached the extremity of the wood, and Bob was hoisted over a six-foot, moss-grown wall. Through more trees, thick with undergrowth, he was forced, and at last he caught a glimpse of an old, gabled house in the gloom ahead.

He knew where he was. This was the weed-choked garden of Mystley Manor—known locally as "Mystery" Manor. It was an old Elizabethan house, decayed and rotten, and almost in ruins. Windows were broken and boarded up; the walls were crumbling; the roof was sagging in places, and great holes gaped in the old tiles.

"The kid'll be safe enough in here!" muttered Steve, with satisfaction. "The old house has been empty for years—"

He broke off abruptly. A figure had appeared from a low, shadowed arch. He was a wizened old man, dressed in a greenish suit, which had once been black. His face was half hidden by white whiskers, and his back was bent and hunched.

"What's this?" he demanded wheezily. "Get out of here! You're trespassing!"

Bob's captors were staggered.

"Gosh!" panted Steve. "I thought the house was empty! But we can easily deal with this old crook—"

"Oh, can ye?" croaked the old man. He gave a peculiar whistle, which trailed away mournfully. "Hey, Satan! Satan!"

A great shadow came leaping from the house. As it drew nearer Bob saw that it was a gigantic Alsatian wolfhound, its fangs bared. With yells of fear, Bob's captors loosed him and fled, crashing wildly through the undergrowth.

"Thanks!" gasped Bob, as the old man cut through his bonds. "You're Riggs, the caretaker, aren't you? I want to thank you, and—"

"I don't want to hear anything," interrupted the caretaker, harshly. "Get ye out! Go on! Hurry! Out with ye!"

The old man seemed to be in very bad humour, and not wishing to annoy him further, Bob hurried down the tangled drive, clambered over the locked gate, and went round by the lane. He retrieved his basket, and ran all the way to the inn, bewildered by his adventure. He found Bulldog Hamilton in the private sitting-room.

"Well, boy?" said Bulldog, removing his pipe, and looking hard at the youngster. "Took your time, didn't you?"

Bob blurted out his adventure; and Bulldog listened intently.

"After me, were they?" he jerked, at length. "H'm! I'll have a look at Mystery Manor myself later on. Anybody live there? What's its history?"

"It's supposed to be haunted," said Bob, lowering his voice. "Nobody lives there except old Riggs, the caretaker. I've heard my dad say that a gentleman named Mr. Rathbone bought the property sixteen or seventeen years ago. He went abroad almost immediately, and nobody has ever seen him since. But he has always paid his rates, and he has always kept old Riggs there, as caretaker."

"Looks fishy," said Bulldog, his eyes gleaming. "Better say nothing to your people about this—they might get alarmed."

They went to supper together and, despite his thoughtful mood, Bulldog Hamilton made a hearty meal. It was after eleven o'clock when the adventurer cautiously climbed the garden wall of Mystery Manor and dropped silently to the other side.

He had his gun handy, and he moved forward with the stealth of a Red Indian. The night was

uncannily still; but Bulldog, skilled in woodcraft, made no sound.

A curious glow amongst the trees to his left caught the adventurer to change his course. An amazing sight met his gaze. Against a dark background of pine trees a smaller tree stood out spectrally, aglow with greenish, uncanny fire, trunk and branches shimmering eerily.

Bulldog Hamilton made a quick move forward—and the solid ground suddenly collapsed beneath his feet with an ominous crackling sound. He pitched headlong into a cunningly prepared pit.

Ere he could scramble to his feet, two men leapt down upon him; something crashed on his head, a thousand fires flashed before his eyes, and he sank into oblivion.

Noah Craddock—Master Crook.

WHEN Bulldog Hamilton came to his senses, he found himself strapped upright against a great oak wall support in an oak-panelled room of Mystery Manor. And old Riggs, the caretaker, was standing before him cackling at his discomfiture.

"Very clever, ain't ye?" wheezed the old caretaker. "But ye made a mistake in comin' here, Mr. Bulldog Hamilton! Old Riggs has caught ye, my interfering busybody!"

"I'm not denying that I am caught," said Bulldog. "But may I ask, Mr. Noah Craddock, why you are so interested in me?"

The old caretaker started back as though he had received a blow in the face.

"Who told you—" he began.

"It is a hobby of mine to memorise the features of all crooks who are wanted by the police," said Bulldog coolly. "You forgot your ears when you adopted that disguise. That was foolish. The police want you for killing a night watchman at Bayswater, don't they? You and your gang disappeared. So this is where you bolted to?"

"You—you dog!" snarled Craddock. "I thought I was safe, too. Old Riggs never had a visitor in years; and he was easy enough to impersonate."

"And I dare say you killed him—or you've got him locked up somewhere?" asked Bulldog.

"I took his place—and it was easy enough for my men to hide in this old house," continued Craddock. "As soon as I heard you were in the village, I knew you were after me—but I got in the first blow. I'm safe here. The police will never dream of looking—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Bulldog imperturbably. "You don't think I was fool enough to walk blindly into the trap, do you? I saw the inspector in the village, and I arranged to meet him again at midnight. And if I fail to turn up he will come to this house to make inquiries."

By this time, Steve and Beppo and the other man had joined their chief. They were one gang—a desperate band of criminals who had been forced to seek refuge in Mystery Manor.

"You are clever, Hamilton—but I am cleverer," said Craddock, his voice charged with menace. "You'll never leave this house alive—and I know you too well to believe that bluff about the police coming. You always work alone."

Craddock was wrong. Outside, in the darkness, a slim figure crept nearer and nearer to the old house. Bob Wallace was on the job. He had begged Bulldog to allow him to have a hand in the adventure. And Bulldog had permitted Bob to remain in the back-ground.

Bob was worried now. He had heard strange sounds some time earlier, and then he had seen two or three dark figures carrying the adventurer into

the house. And the plucky youngster decided to investigate.

A low, savage growl sounded, and Bob saw a shapeless form—a mere black shadow. It was the great Alsatian.

"Here, Satan!" whispered Bob.

He was not afraid. He flung a pound of raw steak towards the dog; he heard the eager sniffing, and he waited. A few minutes later the wolfhound came cautiously towards him, and Bob was now in a squatting position.

"That's all right, old son!" he whispered, reaching forward, and patting Satan's shoulder. "We're pals, aren't we? Good dog!"

He had always been fearless with animals; but it had been Bulldog's idea for Bob to provide himself with a pound of steak.

"Run off, old chap," whispered Bob. "No? Want to stick with me, do you? All right! But don't bark."

The dog gave him a sense of security. There was something amusing in the situation, too. For Bob not only approached the house without interruption, but he crept round until he saw a chink of light between the ill-fitting shutters of a window. He applied his eye to the chink, and quivered with intense excitement.

For he could see Bulldog Hamilton strapped to that oak upright, almost opposite. And at that moment Beppo, the dwarf, came running into the room, his eyes blazing with fear.

"Da cops!" came the dwarf's warning. "Da cops dey come! We make da scoot!"

"My friend the inspector is a reliable man," said Bulldog Hamilton calmly.

NOAH CRADDOCK cursed savagely.

"By Heaven! You shall pay for this, Hamilton!" he snarled. Swinging round upon Beppo he added: "Where were the police when you saw them, you little rat? Speak!"

"Dey maka da walk upa da driva," gasped Beppo.

"All right—we've just got time," said Craddock. "Steve, you dash upstairs and fetch Riggs."

Spinning round, Craddock went to a massive-framed, full-length portrait of an old-time nobleman. The crook pressed on one of the many protrusions of the great carved frame and the picture swung round as though on a pivot. Stone steps were revealed, leading downwards. It was the entrance to a secret cellar.

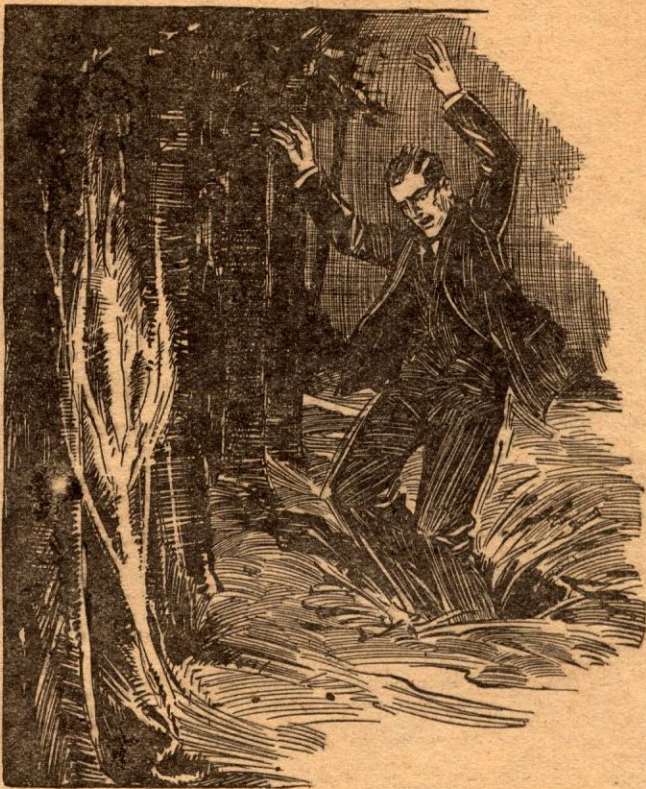
"Down with this man!" said Craddock, hurrying up to Bulldog Hamilton. "Bring the ropes, Beppo."

Bulldog was untied from the beam and then bound with ropes, first his feet, then his arms. Even as Craddock and his men were bundling their prisoner down into the secret cellar, a great bell clanged and jangled in the adjoining hallway. At the same moment Steve appeared with the counterpart of

Craddock—the real Riggs. The unfortunate old man was shaking with terror.

"Bind him!" ordered Craddock. "And see that he and Hamilton are gagged. Then get down into the cellar—all of you!"

The two crooks and the ugly dwarf descended into the darkness after Riggs had been pushed down, and Craddock swung the great picture shut. He seized the lamp and, holding it on high, he went down the wide corridor, across the lofty hall, and unchained the front door. An inspector stood there, accompanied by two burly constables.



TRAPPED BY THE GLOWING TREE.—At sight of the glowing sapling Bulldog hurried forward. Suddenly the ground gave way beneath his feet, and he pitched headlong into a pit.

"What's wrong?" wheezed Craddock testily. "What do you want, disturbin' an old man at this hour of the night?"

The crook's heart was beating hard; but he was acting his part well.

"You know me, Riggs," said Inspector Ford, of the local police. "I want to know if you have seen a gentleman named Mr. Hamilton to-night?"

"I've seen nobody—and if there was any man in these grounds, my dog would have warned me," replied Craddock. "There he is, now."

Satan was visible in the background, his great eyes glowing greenish in the light from the lamp.

"Well, it's queer," said the inspector, looking troubled. "Mr. Hamilton told me that he had certain suspicions about this place, and that he was going to make an investigation."

"You're mad—all of ye!" snapped Craddock. "Who is this man, Hamilton? I don't know anything—"

He broke off as the soft purr of a powerful motor-car made itself heard, and great twin headlights swung round, casting their glare upon the house front. There came a smashing of rotten woodwork, and the gate was swung wide open. The car, a powerful coupé, drove right up to the house, and a tall man, lean, well-dressed, clean-shaven, stepped out. His face was as hard as granite, lined with years of hardship, and his eyes burned in their deep sockets.

"What's going on here?" he asked, with an air of authority.

"May we know who you are, sir?" asked Inspector Ford.

"You may," said the newcomer curtly. "My name is Rathbone—Adam Rathbone—and I am the owner of this property."

The supposed Riggs caught his breath in sharply. Then to cover up his surprise he wheezed: "The master! Lor' sakes! I never thought to see ye again, sir."

Mr. Rathbone looked at him hard—very hard.

"You've grown old, Riggs," he said. "I dare say I've changed a bit, too. Well, what are you police doing here? What's wrong?"

As the inspector quickly explained, Noah Craddock tried to recover completely. There was no doubt that the newcomer was the real owner, for Inspector Ford ventured to cast a doubt on his statement; promptly he produced the keys of the front door and the title deeds of the house itself.

"I hope you're satisfied, Inspector," said Mr. Rathbone, sourly. "But if you want to, you can search the house."

The search was made and, having drawn blank on the ground floor, the police went on a tour of inspection upstairs.

Bob Wallace, crouching outside the window, had heard everything that had passed before; he had seen Bulldog, bound and helpless, flung down into the secret cellar. He had seen Craddock leave the room to answer the ringing of the door bell. Without wasting a second, Bob forced the rotten shutters aside, opened the window, and slipped through. With difficulty in the darkness, he found the operating knob of the picture and swung it open. The light of an electric torch immediately flashed into his face.

"Thanks, boy!" said a cool, staccato voice.

"Bulldog!" gasped Bob.

"Can't shift this secret door from the other side," explained Bulldog Hamilton. "You came at the right minute. Well, what's happened?"

"The police are here—and I believe there's somebody else, too," panted Bob. "I heard them talking as I was crossing the kitchen. Somebody named Rathbone. Must be the real owner, or one of his relatives, or something. But—but what's happened to you, sir?"

"Took me two minutes to break those ropes—they bound me hurriedly," said Bulldog. "I'm strong. Then we had a fight down there."

Bob, utterly breathless, looked at the adventurer. Bulldog was battered slightly; but lying in the cellar, Steve and his companions were knocked senseless.

"Follow me," said the adventurer sharply. "They're coming this way."

He dragged Bob down into the steep stairway, and closed the picture behind him. When the police searched the room, they again drew blank. In the

end, Inspector Ford and his men went away, satisfied that Bulldog Hamilton had not been near the place.

"Now!" said Adam Rathbone, when he and Craddock were alone. "You'll tell me what your game is, my friend."

"Game, sir?" wheezed Craddock. "I'm as puzzled as ye are—"

"Don't stall with me!" snapped Rathbone, making a lunge at Craddock's face, and grasping the white beard. "I thought so! False! You're not Riggs."

Craddock staggered back, and one hand flew to his gun.

"Hold it!" gritted Rathbone, and Craddock saw the muzzle of an automatic staring unwinkingly into his startled face. He suddenly relaxed, and he raised the lamp, so that the light fell full upon his companion's face.

"Adam Rathbone, you said?" he asked mockingly. "I've got another name for you—Arlen Shaff!"

The new arrival compressed his lips until they made a thin, cruel line.

"You've signed your own death warrant!" he snarled.

"Easy!" said Craddock. "We're both in the same game, Shaff. You're the famous American bank robber—released from Sing-Sing two months ago. Well, I'm Noah Craddock—just as good at the game on this side of the water as you are on the other side. Hadn't we better get together?" And he went on to explain his presence there.

"Using the old house as a hide-out, eh?" Rathbone grunted, at length. "Well, Craddock, you'll forget my real name. I'm Rathbone, you understand."

"I understand," said Craddock coolly. "But I'm putting you wise to this bird, Bulldog Hamilton. He means mischief, and we'd better settle with him at once."

Craddock swung the picture round.

"Bring him up, boys!" he called.

There was no answer; and when Craddock went down, flashing a torch, he found his companions strewn over the floor, bruised and battered and knocked out. There was a great gap in the rotten, wooden partition which divided this cellar from the next. And Bulldog Hamilton and Riggs had vanished!

The Secret of the Manor.

IT was old Riggs who had told Bulldog Hamilton that the wooden partition led into another cellar.

Bulldog had easily broken his way through, and, having got out of the house, he had dispatched Bob post-haste to the inn, instructing him to put old Riggs straight to bed.

Craddock and Arlen Shaff, full of consternation at the escape of the prisoners, hurried out into the unkempt grounds.

"They must have got out directly after the police left," panted Craddock. "He won't go for the police, either—he'll work alone."

"And I shall work alone, too, you sap!" said Arlen Shaff between his teeth.

Crash! Before Craddock could move a hand to defend himself, the butt-end of Shaff's gun drove hard on the back of his head; and the crook collapsed in a heap to the weed-covered ground.

Shaff was a powerful man, and now, bending down, he heaved Craddock on to his shoulders, and strode off through the grounds. He made his way out by means of a door set in the garden wall, at the back. Untiringly, he walked across country to an old disused quarry.

Without compunction, he pitched his burden into a black, gaping hole. A splash sounded from some distance below; a gurgle of water—and then silence.

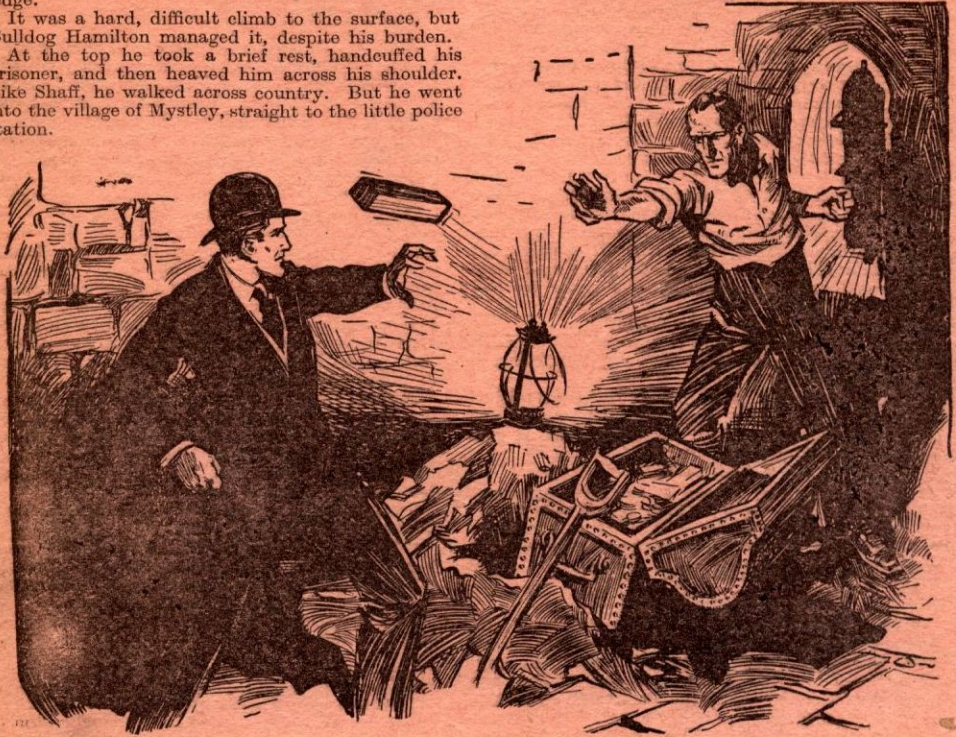
"You'll give me no more trouble," muttered Arlen Shaff, turning on his heel.

Little did he know that Bulldog Hamilton had followed him! And now, as he went back to the Manor at the double, the adventurer dropped swiftly into the disused quarry shaft. He plunged into the icy water—and Craddock, still unconscious, had just risen to the surface. Bulldog dragged him on to a ledge.

It was a hard, difficult climb to the surface, but Bulldog Hamilton managed it, despite his burden.

At the top he took a brief rest, handcuffed his prisoner, and then heaved him across his shoulder. Like Shaff, he walked across country. But he went into the village of Mystley, straight to the little police station.

Arlen Shaff was there, in his shirt sleeves, collarless, digging frantically, assisted by the light from the lamp. As Bulldog watched, Shaff bent down, heaved at something, and pulled it up. It was a metal chest on which was the name of a ship—s.s. *Akron*. He delved among the contents of the chest and produced a great ingot of yellow metal.



A STERLING ENCOUNTER.—Bulldog stepped through the partition. The crook turned with a snarl and hurled an ingot of gold at the adventurer.

"Prisoner No. 1," he announced to the astonished Inspector Ford. "This man is Noah Craddock, wanted by Scotland Yard for a killing. See you later."

He strode off without another word. He called at the Chequers, and found that Bob had discharged his mission well.

"Can I come back with you, Bulldog?" pleaded Bob. "Please let me."

"Come on," said Bulldog, in his blunt way. "You've earned the right, boy."

CREEPING through a broken window, Bulldog and Bob re-entered Mystery Manor, and made their way to the entrance to the secret cellar. Cautiously, Bulldog swung back the picture, and, although he could see nothing, the sounds of curious thudding came to his ears.

He cautiously descended the steps. A flash of his torchlight revealed Steve, Beppo, and the other man—all bound helplessly. Approaching the jagged hole in the wooden partition, Bulldog peered through.

"Bullion, eh?" said Bulldog Hamilton coolly. "I think I know the game now, Mr. Arlen Shaff."

As he spoke he leapt forward. Shaff hurled the gold ingot with all his strength. But Bulldog avoided the missile easily. The next second the pair were at grips. They fought desperately, madly, and Bob Wallace stood looking on, breathless with excitement.

Crash! A perfectly timed right-hander from Bulldog finished the fight. Shaff crashed over, and before he could rise, the handcuffs were snapped over his wrists.

"You fool!" snarled Shaff. "You don't know what you're doing! I'm the owner of this house—"

"I don't doubt it," said Bulldog. "Would you like me to tell you just how you came to own it—seventeen years ago? As the crow flies, we're not a mile from the coast—and over sixteen years ago, during the war, the American liner, *Akron*, was torpedoed by a German submarine in the Channel. She was carrying two million pounds in bullion. That gold was lashed to a raft, on the liner's deck,

and when the vessel went down, the raft floated off, with two guards in charge. The raft was never seen again. You were on that ship, Shaff, and you managed to get on the raft. You killed the two guards, and you drifted ashore in a lonely bay."

"You—you devil!" gasped Shaff.

"Later, you carried the gold—in the darkness, I expect—up to this old deserted house, and you buried it in the cellar, here," Bulldog went on coolly. "Then you bought the house for a song, as that was the easiest way out. You went to America to make arrangements for the disposal of the gold. But I seem to remember, Shaff, that you got mixed up in a gunning affair in New York, and were sentenced to twenty years in Sing-Sing."

"The gold's mine!" snarled Shaff.

"You stole that gold—at the expense of two men's lives," said the adventurer sternly. "I saw that you had been released from Sing-Sing some weeks ago, so it was just another case of putting two and two together when I heard your name. It was unfortunate for you, Shaff, that the Craddock gang used the house as a hide-out. Craddock will be mad when he learns that there was a fortune under his feet all the time."

"Craddock is dead," snapped Shaff.

"Not yet," chuckled Bulldog Hamilton. "I pulled Craddock out of that quarry pool, and I took him to the police station."

Having delivered Shaff over to the astonished Inspector Ford, he also handed over the rest of the Craddock gang, and the two million pounds in gold bullion.

Send secret messages to your fellow-sleuths with the B.M. Mystery Message Maker given FREE with every copy of next week's Mag.

RED MASK OF THE RIO GRANDE

(Continued from page 17.)

"Velly funny," hissed Wun Lun suddenly. He snatched up the dice. Rolled them—tested them again and again. They turned up "nine," "eleven," "four"—all honest points. Jack Jakers, the foreman of the Bar-Eight Ranch, looked on at this test, white-faced.

They suspected him. They cast him lowering glances. Gosh, it was awful! It hurt.

"Them dice is all right," Jack Jakers said huskily.

"So be. Me see," bleated Wun Lun.

The little Chinaman, bristling with suspicion, sprang up and seized an axe. With a sharp cry Jack Jakers sprang forward to stop him. But before he could do so the axe had descended, and one of the ivories split and shattered.

With a cry the Chink held it up. It revealed tiny twin bits of steel, by means of which the Bar-Eight foreman could control the dice through the furtive use of a magnetic current.

It was true. He had been cheating, to make his pals lose their notes—those tell-tale notes from the bank robbery. Swiftly now he scooped them up and stuffed them in his shirt.

Then, while everyone stared transfixed, his guns jumped to his hands. Like the weaving heads of rattlesnakes the long, blue-black bores moved, covering one after another of the startled men. In Jack Jakers' grey eyes was the light of cold ferocity, backed up by sheer desperation.

"No; don't none of yuh make a move," he cried. "I guess th' jig's up, and yuh-all know me now. Case

yuh don't I aims tuh show yuh plain out and open who I am."

He had stepped back a pace or two as he said this, and now stood beside his bunk. With a swift movement he bent down and swung a crimson cloak around his shoulders, adjusted mask and flat-crowned hat. As he jerked erect, whirled and faced the crowd of punchers, a single gasping cry of amaze came from all.

"El Señor Red Mask!"

Jack Jakers knew that right at that moment the Union Loco had dislodged a batch of city detectives at the little cowtown of Mesa, the nearest railroad, and the end of steel. Knew that those diaks were riding to the Bar-Eight "on information received." Well, they would not find a single banknote when they arrived. The young foreman was confident he had got every one.

He had acted according to his light. And now . . . he had got to turn outlaw.

It hurt. It hurt badly to look into the accusing eyes of his pard. But he could not tell them the truth—yet! There was no time. The sleuth hounds from Mesa would arrive at any moment. And in the ranch house itself was a closer menace. His own pards were closing in on him in a tense, grim-lipped circle, hands hovering over the butts of their guns. He must move like greased lightning if he were to make a getaway.

Brrrang! Brrang! His colts vomited flame and lead, not at the Bar-Eight boys, but at the swinging lamp in the bunkhouse ceiling. Darkness came down as the lamp was smashed to smithereens. In the confusion that ensued, Jack Jakers dived through the open window and disappeared.

The rest made to follow, but it was the Dandy Cowboy who restrained them.

"No boys, let him go!" he said quietly. "Jack's busted the show. But things aren't all they seem. We're going to get to the bottom of this mystery. I'll wager Jack's playing a straight game!"

And something in Dade Denham's baffled face told Rex he was right.

Next week's whirlwind yarn of the Dandy Cowboy and Red Mask is crammed full of thrills and startling disclosures. The Mystery Message Maker FREE next week.

EDITOR'S CHAT

(Continued from page 11.)

thrilled by this grand long school yarn next week. In **Ninety in the Shade** you'll meet a firm *Mag.* fun favourite—Tommy Pink the Chem-mystic Kid. Next week Dr. Hypo gives his assistant a mixture that is guaranteed to add fifty years to anyone's age in an hour!

The result is as unexpected as it is funny. If you laugh as much as I did at this yarn you'll need tin ribs!

The above are just a few of the attractions in next week's number, chums. I cannot tell you in detail of the thrills provided by The Master of Masks, the Dirt Track Detective, etc., but I warn you not to miss them next week. And, of course, you won't want to miss THE MYSTERY MESSAGE MAKER. Get ready for this grand gift and meanwhile show all your chums the B.M. Detective Club Badge given this week, get them to form a branch of the new club with you and let me know how many members you get. Full news about the next gift on Saturday.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.