

TOM MERRY & CO. IN AFRICA! Read the Sensational Adventure Story Inside.

The GEM

2^B

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



Astounding Adventures of Figgins and Fatty Wynn in the African Jungle!



Redfern & Co.—were standing in the long mica-windowed promenade deck that was the juniors' exclusive domain. They had been watching the African jungle, over which they were cruising, with the scattered lakes and gleaming rivers and bare granite hills rising out of the tangle of trees. The vast stretches of jungle over which they were passing were almost unexplored land, Sir Napier Wynter had told them—country in which white men had scarcely ever set foot!

But the sight of Baggy Trimble rolling into view at the end of the deck had turned their attentions for the time being to Baggy's extraordinary appearance!

As Fatty Wynn, the junior from little Wales, had just remarked, Baggy looked as though he had been boxing with a steam-roller.

His clothes were dishevelled, his collar was torn from its moorings, his eyes were blackened and half-closed, and his nose was the colour of a very ripe tomato. Someone seemed to have been pouring ink down the back of his neck, in addition.

Altogether, it was quite clear that the unhappy Falstaff of the Fourth had been in the wars!

"Grooooooh!" groaned Baggy, as he limped towards them, blinking at them through his blackened optics. "Oh crumbs! Yow! That beast Grundy—"

"My hat!" grinned Figgins. "Has Grundy been lamming you?"

"Ow! Yes!" moaned Baggy. "Groooh! I'm injured! I think my nose is sprained and my neck broken—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, my neck sprained and my nose broken!" corrected Baggy. "Oh dear! Yow!"

The six New House juniors chuckled.

"What have you been doing to Grundy, anyway, porpoise?" inquired Redfern unfeelingly.

"Nothing!" groaned Baggy. "I only asked him to invite me to join his blessed feed, and he flew at me like a madman! Said it was my fault Lathom pitched into him this morning—"

"Feed? What feed?" ejaculated Fatty Wynn, his eyes



Grundy!" barked Mr. Lathom irritably. "Kindly do me five hundred lines!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Grundy.

The S 1000 droned on through the African sunlight, with a very tense atmosphere in the juniors' class-room. Grundy sat and glared, and most of his glares were directed at Baggy Trimble.

Baggy, in his efforts to get into whispered conversation with Grundy, so that he might try to cadge an invitation to Grundy's feed that night, had unwittingly landed the great George Alfred "in the soup" with a vengeance. And Baggy looked like paying dearly for it when morning classes were over on board the great airship.

CHAPTER 2.

New House on the Warpath!

"MY hat! Look at Baggy!"

"What's he been doing to his chivvy?"

"Looks as if he's been boxing with a steam-roller!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was after dinner on board the S 1000 and the six New House juniors on board—Figgins & Co. and Dick

brightening. He shot a meaning look at his chums. "Is Grundy standing a feed?"

"Yow! Yes! I hope it poisons him!" moaned Baggy.

"I jolly well wouldn't go to it now if he asked me, either!"

"If he went down on bended knees and begged and implored me to, I wouldn't go to his beastly party—"

"I don't think!"

"Oh, really, Lawrence—"

"Half a jiff, you chaps!" muttered Figgins. "This sounds interesting! If these School House bounders are having a feed, the New House ought to know about it, eh?"

There was a very meaning look in Figg's face. His chums nodded quickly.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Kerr, the Scottish junior.

"Hear, hear!" nodded Dick Redfern. "What is this blessed feed, Baggy?"

"Grundy got a whacking remittance at Bombay!" growled Baggy, dabbing at his nose with a handkerchief.

"He bought a lot of tuck before we left India, and he's having a midnight feed! He's asked Tom Merry & Co., and Talbot and Skimmy. I told him no party was complete without me, but—"

"Never mind about that," grinned Figgins. "What time is the spread, porpoise? Where are they going to have it?"

"After lights out, in Grundy's cubicle," grunted Baggy. Suddenly he brightened. A vicious grin appeared on his face. "I'll tell you what. It would serve the beast right if you New House chaps raided it, you know!"

That was precisely the idea that was already in the minds of Figgins & Co. A School House feed was always fair game—just as a New House spread was always fair game to their School House rivals. But the six New House stalwarts pretended to be thoroughly astonished at Baggy's vindictive suggestion.

"Raid it—us?" murmured Redfern. "Oh, no!"

"Hardly!" said Figgins gravely, shaking his head.

"Better not!" said Fatty Wynn, equally solemn.

"Rats!" muttered Baggy excitedly, with a hasty glance round. "It would jolly well serve Grundy right—the beast! He, he, he! It would be a great rag! You don't funk Tom Merry & Co., do you?"

"Of course not, ass!" roared Figgins. "Why, you blessed fat toad—"

"Oh, really, Figgy! I don't think it's very nice of you to talk like that, after I've told you all about it," said Baggy, with an injured air. "But the New House always were an ungrateful lot of beasts! I—I mean," corrected Baggy hastily, "if I were you, I'd jolly well raid 'em to-night, so there!"

And Baggy, not quite liking the looks on the faces of the New House fellows, rolled away.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"The blessed fat traitor!" growled Redfern. "Fancy a School House chap egging us on to raid a School House feed!"

"Oh, Baggy would do anything!" said Owen, with a shrug. He chuckled. "But it's a good scheme, all the same! What about it, you chaps?"

"It's on!" nodded Figgins firmly. "We'll raid that feed all right! Lucky Baggy's waxed with Grundy, and let the cat out of the bag!"

"Rather!"

And with many a chuckle, the New House six laid their plans!

CHAPTER 3.

Into the Unknown!

"WADE in, you chaps!"

"What-ho! Rather!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Pass those preserved fruits, Lowther, old chap!"

"Try one of these gingersnaps, Hancock, old scout!"

"I guess I will, buddy!"

In the big sleeping cubicle which Grundy shared with Reginald Talbot and Herbert Skimpole, the midnight feast was beginning in fine style.

The Shell fellows were all present with the exception of Frederick Burkett and his crony, Gerald Crooke, who had not been asked. Clad in pyjamas—it was so warm that dressing-gowns were quite unnecessary—Grundy and his six guests were tackling the good things provided in high spirits.

Grundy had laid in a wonderful spread. In addition to Western dishes, such as French pastries, jam tarts, and iced cakes, Grundy had also purchased, before leaving India's sunny clime, a quantity of strange delicacies that were none the less appetising for being unusual to the juniors—as they were busily proving. Rich Eastern cakes, and spiced concoctions of various kinds, Indian pickles and curries, and jars of delicious ginger, were all laid out on the sheet spread on the floor, round which the seven Shell fellows were gathered.

"Pile in, you chaps!" repeated Grundy grandly, with a wave of his arm. "Help yourselves, you know!"

"Trust us!" grinned Monty Lowther, helping himself to some pickled olives. "I say, these Indian johnnies certainly have some prime grub!"

"I guess I'll give my inside a surprise with some of that curry," drawled Cyrus K. Hancock, the American junior.

"After you with the tarts, Skimmy!"

Herbert Skimpole, the skinny, spectacled freak of the Shell, gravely handed Grundy the tarts, as the S 1000 droned on under the African stars.

It was a strange spot for a midnight spread, if ever there was one. Midnight feasts were not uncommon in the dormitories of St. Jim's; but on board the airship they were decidedly unusual. And the thrill of knowing that they were speeding through the sky above the mysterious

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jungle of Central Africa lent an added zest to Grundy's party.

Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, who was a nephew of Sir Napier Wynter's, had been along the passage connecting the juniors' cubicles long before to make sure that all lights were out. By now, the midnight feasters believed, the whole airship's complement was sleeping soundly with the exception of themselves and those members of the crew who were at their posts.

And, with cheery talk and laughter keeping things lively, Grundy's magnificent spread began to vanish rapidly.

"That fat bounder Baggy wanted to be asked," remarked Grundy, with a chuckle. "I walloped him! He jolly well deserved it, too! It was through that fat porpoise that old Lathom—Hallo! What the dickens—"

Grundy broke off with a sudden, startled gasp.

There were no doors to the cubicles; in their place light curtains hung over the entrances. And the curtain behind Grundy had suddenly been dragged back.

"Look out!" gasped Tom Merry.

He leapt to his feet. Half a dozen pyjama-clad figures were crowding into the cubicle with grinning faces.

"New House!" yelled Manners. "Look out! Oh, my hat!"

Manners broke off as Dick Redfern collared him and swept him off his feet. The New House crowd surged in.

The School House fellows, utterly taken by surprise, were scrambling to their feet in sudden alarm. But they were too late to defend themselves very effectively. Though there were seven of them to the New House six, Herbert Skimpole was a weedy individual—the freak of the Shell ran to brains, not brawn—and so the odds were about equal. But with the advantage of surprise, the New House attackers had things all their own way!

They had crept down the passage noiselessly, each armed with a cord, in which was tied a big noose. They had rushed in and flung these nooses over the startled School House feasters before the latter could guess their purpose. And, with their arms pinned to their sides as the nooses were drawn tight, they were helpless enough!

Despite their struggles, the School House juniors soon found themselves helplessly entwined in the ropes, each with a New House fellow seated triumphantly upon his chest.

"You—you rotters!" hooted Grundy wildly, struggling desperately to free his arms. "Oh, you cads—"

"Hush, oh, hush!" grinned Figgins, who was sitting on Grundy, fastening the cord securely round Grundy's wrists.

"Let not the naughty passions rise, Georgie—"

"I'll slaughter you!" gasped Grundy. "I'll jolly well—Oh! Grooooh! Mmmmmmm!"

Figgins, grinning, had picked up a slice of spiced Indian cake and jammed it into Grundy's mouth, effectively silencing the furious George Alfred.

"All serene?" chuckled Figgins, glancing round.

"Absolutely!" nodded Lawrence. "A giddy bloodless victory!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good egg!"

"You—you—you—" spluttered Monty Lowther.

"Leggo, you rotters!" panted Tom Merry, writhing desperately. "Look out, you chaps—they'll collar the grub—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House fellows chortled with merriment as they rose to their feet and watched the helpless writhings of their tightly-bound rivals. The surprise of their attack had certainly given them a bloodless victory, as Lawrence had said. It had scarcely taken a couple of minutes for them to be complete masters of the situation.

The School House fellows gasped and choked with wrath as their grinning captors tucked into the delicacies without more ado. Grundy, who had at last ejected most of the cake from his mouth, spluttered furiously as he saw his feast vanishing before his very eyes.

"I—I—I'll wallop the lot of you!" hooted Grundy, wriggling like a hooked fish. "Leave that grub alone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wynn, you fat cad—"

Fatty Wynn, cheerfully piling his plate with all manner of delicacies, turned a broad, grinning countenance to the furious provider of the feast.

"That's not a polite way to talk to a guest, Grundy," said Fatty Wynn, shaking his finger gravely at the seething George Alfred. "Where are your manners?"

"You—you—you—"

"These blessed School House bounders haven't any manners, have they?" murmured Dick Redfern, helping himself to a second plateful of curry.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

Watched by the helpless figures of their raging rivals, the victorious New House fellows made the good things vanish at an astonishing rate. Fatty Wynn, in particular,



Out of the gloom came a dozen leaping figures, armed with knives and spears, who quickly surrounded Figgins!

was putting up an amazing performance in the way of an appetite. The champion trencherman of the New House was excelling himself, as he tackled Grundy's feed, while the airship droned on its way across the heart of the Dark Continent.

When at last there was nothing left of the feed, except a few odd crumbs, Figgins & Co. rose, grinning, to their feet.

"Thanks awfully for the feed, Grundy, old chap!" chuckled Figgy.

Grundy's only reply was an incoherent roar of rage.

"Now, are we to let you chaps go?" went on Figgins cheerfully. "Or shall we leave you trussed up for the night?"

Looks of dismay leapt into the faces of the unhappy School House fellows.

"My—my dear Figgins!" gasped Herbert Skimpole feebly. "I trust that you will not be so inconsiderate as to condemn us to spend the remainder of the nocturnal hours in this excessively uncomfortable predicament! I sincerely trust—"

"The thing is," chuckled Figgins, "if we let you go, will you all promise on your honour to make it pax? If you won't, you can stay trussed up till morning!"

The School House fellows surveyed the cheery leader of the New House with feelings too deep for words.

But there was clearly no help for it! Unless they gave their promise that Figgins & Co. could go their way in peace, they would clearly be left tied up until morning, when the other School House juniors would find them. Rather than face a night like that, they were willing to give their promise, much though it went against the grain to do so. Even Grundy realised that it was necessary.

"All right," growled Tom Merry. "We won't touch you! But just wait till to-morrow, you rotters!"

He grinned ruefully. The others gave their promises, and Figgins & Co. untied them and departed with grinning faces, as the School House juniors scrambled to their feet and rubbed their aching limbs.

There was no doubt that New House had scored heavily!

But even Figgins & Co. might have been less pleased with themselves, as they trooped off to their own quarters, had they been able to see the amazing, far-reaching results of their midnight raid upon Grundy's party!

Groan!

In the sleeping-cubicle which Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty

Wynn shared, a faint groan broke the stillness above the level hum of the airship's great engines.

Figgins & Co. were sleeping. Fatty Wynn, from whom the groan had come, was as sound asleep as either of his chums. But his gigantic feed, when the New House crowd had raided Grundy's midnight party, was giving him bad dreams!

"Mum—mum—mmm! Ooooooh!"

The Falstaff of the New House groaned again.

It was, perhaps, the Indian curry and sweetmeats that were causing the trouble. Fatty Wynn could sleep well after huge suppers as a rule, but Grundy's Eastern delicacies had been more than even David Llewellyn Wynn could stand, apparently!

"Moooooo—o—o—oh!"

There was a rustling of bedclothes in the gloom of the cubicle. The portly figure of Fatty Wynn had emerged, climbing out of his bunk. His eyes were still closed as he stood in the centre of the cubicle, his hands groping round him.

Fatty Wynn was walking in his sleep!

Figgins and Kerr were still sleeping soundly, breathing with quiet regularity, as their fat chum, with eyes still closed, groped his way across the cubicle, as sound asleep as they, despite his deliberate movements.

Though Fatty Wynn had been known to walk in his sleep at St. Jim's, he was not supposed, as a rule, to be addicted to that dangerous and rather eerie habit, and there had been no precautions taken in case of such an event.

What the Welsh junior was dreaming about, only he knew. Perhaps his sleeping brain was busy with mental pictures of a disaster to the S 1000. Whatever the reason, the sleep-walking New House junior was taking down one of the parachutes with which the airship was provided, like lifebelts on a liner, and with his eyes still fast-closed was proceeding to fasten it to his pyjama-clad figure.

Muttering to himself, Fatty Wynn adjusted the last strap, and turned gropingly towards the circular window opposite the entrance to the cubicle.

"What the dickens—"

Figgins' eyes had opened. He had been awakened, perhaps, by some sixth sense penetrating his sleeping brain, warning him of the dire peril of his fat chum.

The leader of the New House juniors sat up in his bunk peering through the gloom.

"What's up, Fatty?" muttered Figgins in astonishment, as he saw his chum moving towards the window, hands stretched out queerly in front of him.

There was no answer from Fatty Wynn. From Figgins there broke a sudden startled, breathless cry.

The sight of his chum's face, with its closed eyes and far-away look, had suddenly told Figgins the truth.

"Great Scott! He's walking in his sleep!" breathed Figgins. "And he's put a parachute on!"

Even yet Figgins had not realised the danger. He threw aside the bedclothes, softly slipping to the floor. He was careful to make no sound, for he knew that in cases of sleep-walking it is dangerous to waken the sufferer suddenly.

He turned to Kerr's bunk, and reached out a hand to wake up the Scottish junior. Kerr opened his eyes, and sat up sleepily—just in time to hear a cry of alarm break from Figgins' lips.

Figgins, glancing round again at Fatty Wynn, had seen the Welsh junior unfasten the window and open it. A rush of hot night air came streaming in.

"Whassamatter?" mumbled Kerr, rubbing his eyes.

But the next moment his sleepy senses cleared with a rush!

He had seen Figgins, his face as white as paper, hurl himself across the cubicle. Too late. The fat figure of Fatty Wynn had climbed through with a sudden unexpected quickness that had prevented Figgins getting to him in time to drag him back to safety—and the fat New House junior, his eyes still closed, had dropped from sight, down into the vast emptiness below the flying derigible.

There was a sobbing cry from George Figgins.

"My heavens!"

Kerr sprang across to his chum's side.

"He's gone!" panted Figgins, his voice utterly unlike his own. "Good heavens—he's gone!"

He leant out, his face ashen, staring down.

In the starlight a dwindling white shape could be seen floating earthwards, swaying down towards the blackness of the jungle, far beneath. Whether Fatty Wynn had pulled the cord that opened the parachute while still sleeping, or if he had awakened, and realising something of what had happened, had instinctively pulled the cord, Figgins could not know. But he drew a sobbing breath of relief. The parachute would at any rate save his chum from being dashed to a terrible death far below.

"What—what—" stammered Kerr.

"He was walking in his sleep!" groaned Figgins. "He put on a parachute and jumped out before I could stop him!"

Kerr's eyes were filled with horror. But before he could speak Figgins had grasped him by the arm.

"Raise the alarm!" he panted. "Tell 'em to stop the airship! Quick!"

He sprang to where the parachutes were kept, and hastily began strapping one on. Kerr watched him with dumb astonishment.

"I'm going after him!" snapped Figgins fiercely.

It was the work of a minute to fasten the parachute securely. He turned again to the window, his face set with grim resolve.

"Figgy—"

"Tell 'em to stop the airship!" repeated Figgins fiercely. "His parachute opened all right. He's safe, with luck. But he may have been hurt in landing—"

He squeezed out through the circular opening.

Kerr made an instinctive movement to restrain him, but fell back at sight of the look on his chum's face.

"Leave me alone!" panted Figgins. "Hands off!"

The next moment Figgins had leapt out into the darkness—and was dropping like a stone. The parachute fluttered open in a few moments, filled out, and swayed slowly earthwards, down towards the mysterious African jungle, with all its hidden dangers and terrors—while the great airship droned on its way through the starry night.

CHAPTER 4.

In Savages' Hands!

DOWN and down, gently swaying, the parachute floated, Figgins staring downwards at the dim shapes of giant trees that were rising slowly to meet him.

It seemed an eternity before at last he was near the earth. But his eyes had grown used to the faint starlight, and he could see that luck was with him; he was drifting down towards an open space among the trees—a few minutes later his feet were swishing through long jungle grass. He struck the ground with a breathless jolt, bending his knees instinctively, otherwise his ankles might easily have been broken.

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The next moment, as he strove for a foothold, he was jerked off his feet, and dragged sideways through the grass, while the parachute swung down and collapsed limply near him.

His pyjamas torn, his hands and face scratched and bleeding, Figgins struggled to his feet, staring round.

Alone in the jungle!

There was no sign of Fatty Wynn—no sign of the S 1000. The airship had vanished beyond the trees; but he could still hear its engines humming through the quiet of the tropic night. The edge of the jungle was silhouetted against the stars, black and motionless.

Figgins had never felt so lonely in his life. For a moment something almost like panic gripped him. It was unnerving to know that he was down there in the wilds of Central Africa, utterly unable to regain the airship, for the while, at any rate, and utterly unarmed. He had slipped on a pair of slippers before jumping, but he was clad only in flimsy pyjamas. It was all rather like a dream—a weird, horrible dream!

But he shook those thoughts from his brain as he hastily began to unfasten the straps of the parachute.

At any cost, he must find his chum!

He sent a hoarse shout ringing through the gloom. There was no answer—only the faint far-off howl of a wild beast prowling somewhere in the depths of the tropical forest that hemmed him in.

Again he shouted, and again.

A sickening sense of dread seized him when there was still no reply. He knew that he could not be very far from the spot where Fatty Wynn had landed. Why had his chum not answered? In that eerie silence of the jungle, surely Fatty Wynn must have heard!

He broke into a stumbling run towards the trees, in the direction of the spot in which he judged his chum to have landed.

His shouts echoed among the trunks of the giant tangled trees as he plunged in among them, his face pale and desperate. Something slithered from his path—a thin, evil-looking snake. Figgins scarcely noticed it.

What had happened to his chum?

A sudden shadowy movement among the trees ahead caught his eyes, bringing a swift exclamation to his lips. He came to a standstill, peering towards the spot where that mysterious movement had been. He could see nothing. But there was a queer, suspicious rustling among the thick-growing foliage around him—and the next instant a startled cry broke from him.

Out of the gloom, a dozen leaping, running shapes had burst into view, closing in upon him. He caught the glint of spearheads in the starlight that penetrated the interlaced boughs above his head. Almost before he realised his danger, Figgins found himself surrounded by a ring of the most savage-looking men he had ever seen—half-naked blacks, with shields and spears, and glittering eyes. A long spear whizzed past his head.

He ducked instinctively. Before he could straighten himself again, a stunning blow knocked him sideways. One of the savages had brought a club swinging down upon his head—and for the time being Figgins knew no more!

When Figgins opened his eyes again, his head was aching sickeningly, and for some moments he could not collect his senses at all. The dull pain in his head seemed to blind him. But he could hear the faint ripple of water, and a soft splashing sound, which he began to realise was the splash of paddles.

He was lying prone. He tried to struggle up, but found that his arms were bound to his sides. He sank back with a groan.

Staring upwards, he saw dense foliage black against the starry sky. He realised that he was in a long canoe that was being paddled by his savage captors along some river that wound through the dense jungle, hemmed in on all sides by giant trees, whose tangled boughs dipped into the water by the marshy banks.

And then his heart leapt.

A voice had called his name—a voice he knew!

"Figgy—"

It was the voice of Fatty Wynn.

At that sound, Figgins' brain seemed to clear as if by magic. He raised his head, and then he saw that the chum to whose rescue he had leapt from the airship was lying bound in the bottom of the long canoe, near him.

"Figgy, old chap!" Fatty Wynn's voice was hoarse. "Are you all right?"

"Rather!" returned Figgins, with a cheerfulness that he was far from feeling. "Are you all right, too?"

"Yes, more or less." Fatty Wynn, too, tried to speak with a cheeriness that seemed almost out of place in their present plight. Though the shock of what had happened had been greater for him than even for Figgins, seeing

that he had awakened from his trance-like state to find himself swaying to earth by parachute, when he had gone to sleep safely in the airship, Fatty Wynn was not the fellow to show the white feather. "I say, old chap, we're in the soup!"

"Looks like it!" muttered Figgins. "So they got you, too!"

He stared at the nearest black—an ebony-faced savage who was paddling steadily, taking no notice of the captives near his feet.

"Wonder where the dickens these chaps are taking us?" grunted Fatty Wynn. "And why?"

"We'll know pretty soon, I suppose," said Figgins quietly. "I only hope—"

He broke off. His voice had gone rather strained. Figgins knew only too well that there are still tribes in Central Africa that are cannibal. But he dared not pursue that line of thought.

"Don't worry, old chap," he said hoarsely. "The airship will stop—Kerr knows where we fell! They'll land somehow, and search for us."

He broke off again, closing his eyes wearily. His head still ached splittingly. Though he did not know it, there was caked blood upon his temple where the black man's club had struck him down.

With flashing paddles the long canoe shot on downstream.

The sky above the over-arching trees seemed to be growing lighter, as though dawn was coming. In the humid heat, a faint mist was drifting over the surface of the turgid, coffee-coloured water. On either side, where the water lapped the swampy banks among the roots of trees, dim in the gloom, huge crocodiles were lying motionless on the mud-banks. Here and there, where the river widened into pools, schools of hippopotami lay half-submerged, and the air was alive with darting insects.

Figgins' aching brain took in little of the strange scene. Oddly enough, his thoughts had turned to far-off St. Jim's.

In the giant airship, the school had seemed far enough away; but down here, in the depths of the jungle, it was as though his comparatively short drop from the S 1000 had put another thousand miles between him and England! An hour before, he and Fatty Wynn had been safe in the great dirigible, surrounded by all the atmosphere of civilisation. Down here in the humid jungle of the Congo, civilisation seemed already a dim memory, and St. Jim's a place out of another world!

An hour ago, safe on board the great airship! And now, prisoners in the hands of savages, being borne away deeper and deeper into the mysterious depths of the tropical forest!

And travelling by water as they were, how could they hope that their friends from the airship would ever track them down, to save them from whatever dreadful fate awaited them?

Figgins shuddered as that realisation came to him.

The airship party might find the fallen parachutes; but of the two New House juniors there would be no sign! The jungle would have swallowed them utterly, without trace!

CHAPTER 5.
The Witch-Doctor!

FOR what seemed an interminable distance to the two St. Jim's youngsters, the long canoe sped on between the dark banks of mud. But at last, on turning another of the innumerable twists in the stream, the men at the paddles cut in towards the water's edge, at a point where a number of huts were grouped in a clearing beside the river.

A shout from one of the blacks in the canoe brought a swarm of natives hurrying into view.

The nose of the ungainly craft scraped against the bank, and Figgins, still half dazed, was dragged out of the bottom of the canoe and thrust ashore, with Fatty Wynn.

There was no doubt that their arrival had caused a sensation in the native village.

The crowd of blacks were gesticulating wildly as they crowded round, jabbering excitedly in a queer tongue.

"We seem to be the star turn," grunted Fatty Wynn, with wry humour.

Figgins nodded with a faint grin.

With their arms still securely fastened to their sides, the two youngsters were hustled towards one of the huts.

It seemed to be the largest hut in the clearing—evidently the residence of the headman of the village. They had scarcely halted outside it before the occupant appeared—an enormously fat native, with a queer headdress of feathers, and metal ornaments jingling from his neck and ebony arms.

At his appearance, the jabbering of the rest ceased instantly.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn, each supported between a couple of almost naked negroes, faced the bulky chieftain with set faces. They were not going to show the white feather. But they felt instinctively, nevertheless, that this man with the thick lips and bloodshot eyes, held their lives in his hands.

And then they had the shock of their lives! He was addressing them—in English!

"Who you be?"

His voice was hostile, with its queer, faltering accent. His English was evidently of a very primitive nature. But the fact that they were able to talk with him had brought an instantaneous rush of relief to both Figgins and Fatty Wynn.

At any rate, they would no longer be in the dark concerning their fate!

Figgins faced the fat chieftain with steady eyes. Though he felt that he and his chum were in deadly danger, it would not do to let this man think they were afraid. They must try to bluff it out.

"We're English," retorted Figgins grimly. "And if you don't let us go jolly quick, you'll find yourself in trouble. We have friends with us—powerful friends. They will follow us here. If they find that we have been harmed, you'll get it in the neck—if you know what that means!"

"You bet!" nodded Fatty Wynn, with an equal show of confidence.

The chief grunted.

It seemed to Figgins that the man was oddly uneasy. His bloodshot eyes shifted to his followers, and for a minute or so he questioned them in his own tongue. At last he turned to the two captive youngsters.

"I told you come from sky!" he said, watching them with a keen stare. "That mad talk. Who you be?" A queer glint came into his flashing eyes. "You from—?" He paused, and his next words were in a queer, uneasy mutter. "You from Valley of Thunder?"

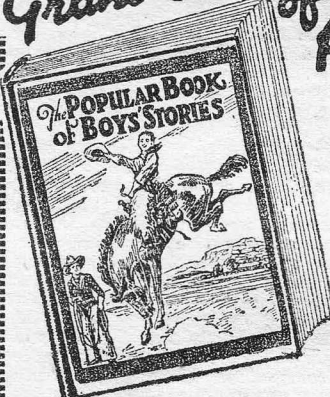
The very mention of the words seemed almost to scare him, for some mysterious reason. He glanced round uneasily as he spoke.

"You come from Valley of Thunder?" he repeated. "You come from white men of Valley of Thunder?"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn glanced at one another with astonishment.

(Continued on next page.)

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Just what the man meant was a mystery. But his words seemed to hint at the presence in the neighbourhood of white men—though how any white men came to be in this lost corner of Central Africa was bewildering!

"The white men of the Valley of Thunder?" muttered Figgins under his breath. "What the dickens is he driving at?"

"Goodness knows!" grunted Fatty Wynn.

It flashed into Figgins' mind that it might be a good idea to pretend that they did come from that mysterious and apparently dreaded spot. But it was safer not to risk a plunge in the dark, he decided.

"No," he answered, "we don't come from the Valley of Thunder. It's true enough what your chaps said—we came from the sky. We came out of an airship, if you know what that is."

The chieftain broke in with an impatient exclamation.

It was quite clear that he knew nothing of aircraft, and utterly refused to believe that story.

But the fact that Figgins had denied any connection with the mysterious Valley of Thunder—whatever that place might be—seemed to have relieved him considerably. His black face cleared to some extent, though his eyes still held a faintly suspicious gleam.

But before he could speak there came a sudden interruption.

From one of the other huts a weird figure had suddenly emerged—a thin, shrivelled figure, with evil eyes and a mass of horrible ornaments festooned over his shrunken frame, apparently made for the most part from human bones. His hands were skinny and claw-like, and seemed to be trembling with excitement as he bounded towards the group.

The black men fell back hastily at his approach.

That the newcomer was the village witch-doctor Figgins and Fatty Wynn both realised in a moment. And something in the evil face, with its horrible grin displaying the shrunken gums and broken yellow teeth, caused a sudden cold shiver to run down Figgins' spine.

The witch-doctor, mumbling excitedly, threw himself face-down before the chieftain, his whole skinny frame quivering strangely.

The chieftain said something in an uneasy tone, and a torrent of shrill words answered him, as the witch-doctor leapt to his feet and began capering wildly in front of the captive youngsters. What he was saying they could not know; but the look in his black, beady eyes as he danced and mumbled before them told Figgins and Fatty Wynn well enough that they had every reason to dread the horrible figure with its festoons of bones.

"This chap doesn't mean us any good," muttered Figgins under his breath. "I believe the chief was going to let us go, but—"

He broke off. With a final wild shriek that echoed weirdly across the clearing, the witch-doctor had halted in his crazy dance, with his two skinny arms outflung, a hand pointing to each of his helpless captives.

The chieftain's bloodshot eyes went startled, and darkened. The rest of the blacks fell away as if in superstitious terror from the proximity of the witch-doctor and the two captive youngsters at whom his outflung arms were pointing accusingly, menacingly. The beady eyes of the wild figure burnt into Figgins' with a fanatical glare.

Suddenly he threw back his head, and a cackle of dreadful laughter burst from his lips. He turned to the chieftain, who had taken a few paces back, as if in uneasy fear of the nearness of the two white prisoners.

"What the dickens—" gasped Fatty Wynn.

Figgins found his voice.

"Look here," he said in quiet, grim tones, "I dunno what all this monkey business means, but I tell you the sooner you let us go and take us back to where you found us the better it'll be for you! See? Our friends—"

The chieftain broke in on his words snarlingly.

"Cease!" he exclaimed harshly. "You bad! Kala all wise! He say you bad spirits—sacrifice! If sacrifice you, we free of curse! Sacrifice you, and white men of Valley of Thunder go leave us for ever!"

Figgins stared back at him dazedly.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he panted. "We know nothing about the Valley of Thunder, of the white men there! I tell you—"

He did not finish his words. At a sign from the chieftain four of the natives flung themselves upon Figgins and Fatty Wynn and dragged them across the clearing to one of the

huts, flinging them in. The two juniors collapsed on the earthen floor, breathless and bruised.

The heavy figure of the chieftain loomed up in the doorway, glaring in at them. The skinny witch-doctor could be seen peering in past him, his yellow fangs revealed with a grin of evil glee.

"You sacrifice—now!" exclaimed the chief fiercely. He smiled, his white teeth flashing in his dusky countenance. "Then we free of curse of Valley of Thunder for ever!"

He swung on his heel and marched away, leaving Figgins and Fatty Wynn lying bound and helpless where they had fallen in the gloom of the hut.

What it all meant they could not imagine. But one thing was only too terribly plain to them—thanks to the evil influence of the witch-doctor, they were to be sacrificed there and then to allay some strange curse that the savages believed to hang over them—the curse of the mysterious Valley of Thunder!

CHAPTER 6.

At the Stake!

THEY were not left long in ignorance of the precise nature of their fate.

The sun had risen by now, and in the glare outside the stifling little hut into which they had been flung they could see a dozen excited blacks hammering two tall stakes into the ground in the centre of the clearing. Some of them were collecting great piles of dry faggots and laying them round the base of the posts.

"Good heavens!" Fatty Wynn's voice was so hoarse as to be almost incoherent as he realised what their fate was to be. "They—they're going to burn us alive!"

Figgins licked his tongue along his parched lips.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, old chap!" he muttered. His face had gone drawn and haggard. "We aren't dead yet!"

His thoughts flew to the airship. For a moment the desperate hope leapt into his mind that perhaps their friends on board the S1000 might

find them before they could be dragged out to their dreadful doom.

But the hope died almost instantly.

By now, very likely, the St. Jim's party from the giant dirigible had effected a landing at the spot where they had jumped out by parachute; they might even have already discovered the two parachutes lying where they had left them. But how could they possibly trace them up the river, all those miles, to this jungle village?

Figgins felt a sickening horror grip him.

"We've got to keep a stiff upper lip," he repeated in a voice that seemed to choke in his throat. "If the worst happens, it'll soon be over—"

"If only we knew what they meant about the Valley of Thunder!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "Perhaps we could persuade them then that we are nothing to do with it."

The minutes dragged on. The hut was filled with insects that hummed to and fro, settling on their faces, tormenting them with their stings. But they were helpless even to keep off the mosquitoes—not that in their present sense of overwhelming horror they could worry much about anything but the ghastly fate in store.

By now a huge pile of faggots surrounded each of the stakes in the clearing.

They could see the skinny figure of the witch-doctor capering about excitedly, jabbering and waving his arms. That he was held in the greatest respect by the blacks was evident. Figgins and Fatty Wynn had already had proof that even the chief was under the man's influence.

That the chieftain would have released them had it not been for the interference of Kala, the witch-doctor, Figgins felt convinced.

At last, it seemed, all the preparations were ready.

Four blacks entered the hut, and the two captive juniors were dragged to their feet and out into the sunlight.

A wild yell from the assembled crowd of natives greeted their appearance.

A huge ring had been formed round the stakes, with a kind of throne placed for the chieftain, who was seated upon it in state. He seemed to have donned a quantity of further ornaments for the occasion, and his face was eager and excited as he watched Figgins and Fatty Wynn dragged to the stakes and lashed to them.

Beside his throne, Kala, the witch-doctor, was standing, waving his skinny black arms and muttering.

The four blacks, their task completed, stepped back.

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The blacks prostrated themselves in a circle around the astonished Arthur Augustus!

Figgins and Fatty Wynn, each bound to one of the big stakes, their feet among the piled faggots, stared round dazedly, with ashen faces.

Despite himself, a sobbing cry broke from Fatty Wynn.

Figgins, fighting to rid his voice of any tremor, gazed across towards the seated chieftain.

"I warn you!" he cried hoarsely. "You'll be sorry if you do this! Our friends are powerful. They will revenge us. White men will come to your village and destroy it utterly if you harm a hair of our heads!"

At his words, an excited murmur arose from the ring of blacks. They could not understand what Figgins had said, but that he had been uttering a threat was clear enough.

But the chieftain only grinned maliciously.

"You die!" he said, in his guttural voice. "Kala knows. Kala say you die, and then the curse of Valley of Thunder upon us no more! Good!"

"It's a lie!" cried Figgins fiercely. "He doesn't know what he's talking about! It won't do you any good, killing us! It'll only mean harm for you!"

The chief shook his head, with another grin. He signed to a couple of his followers, and they ran forward with lighted torches.

Figgins felt his senses reeling with the horror of it. It was clearly useless to try to argue with the chieftain. The witch-doctor had said that if the two white captives were sacrificed, it would lift some mysterious curse, and whatever they said could not shake the chieftain's belief that it would be so.

One of the men with torches had halted before him, with an evil grin on his ebony face.

The man muttered something as his eyes met Figgins', and made some queer sign, evidently with an idea of averting the risk of the "Evil Eye." He stooped, and thrust the torch into the faggots.

With a sharp crackle, and a sudden swirl of smoke, the dry sticks burst into flame.

Figgins gave a sobbing cry as the smoke rose past his face. The breeze blew it round his head, filling his nostrils with pungent fumes, choking him.

From the stake near him to which Fatty Wynn was bound, he heard another crackle of flame, as the second black ignited the faggots piled around his chum.

"Figgy, old chap—"

Fatty Wynn's words broke off incoherently. Figgins turned his head towards his chum.

"Cheerio, old man," he managed. "It'll soon be over!"

There was a grunt from the black man with the torch. The wood was not burning as fast as he wanted. He stooped to thrust the torch in among the sticks at another point.

And then a sudden, excited shout from the other side of the clearing came to Figgins' ears above the increasing crackle of the flames. It was taken up on all sides—wild, excited cries filled the clearing.

Figgins stared with smarting eyes through the thickening smoke.

He saw that the chieftain had leapt to his feet—that the rest of the blacks were paying no more attention to the captives at the stake, but were huddling back in fear from a figure that had come striding into the clearing from the direction of the river. Some of them were dropping to their knees, covering their faces in terror.

Figgins' heart leapt.

For the newcomer was a white man!

He cried out wildly. A swirling eddy of smoke swept past his face, blinding him, choking him. But the next moment a huge figure loomed up beside him, the figure of a gigantic black man, with a rifle swung across his massive shoulder. The man had a knife in his hand, was slashing at his bonds. As the flames swept into sudden roaring activity at his feet Figgins lurched sideways, freed from the stake, into the arms of his rescuer.

He was saved!

CHAPTER 7.

Da Rosa!

"**C**ARAMBA! White boys!"

A silky voice fell upon Figgins' ears, as he passed a hand across his streaming eyes, and stared round.

The white man he had seen stride into the clearing was standing before him, surveying him in evident astonishment.

He was a striking-looking individual—tall, with a thin, black moustache, and glittering black eyes. His thin, sallow face was hard and cruel, despite the slight smile that hovered over his lips. From his soft, foreign voice it was clear that he was not English. He looked like a Spaniard, or a Portuguese.

Under his arm he carried a gleaming Winchester rifle. He was clad in white from head to foot, with a wide hat tilted over his eyes. He was a handsome man, there was no doubt about that. But something in the cruel face brought a chill to Figgins' heart, despite the rush of almost hysterical relief that had swept over him at his last-minute rescue from a ghastly death.

Fatty Wynn, too, had been released before the flames had reached him.

The tall man in white glanced from one to another of the two St. Jim's juniors with evident bewilderment.

How two white youngsters, clad in torn pyjamas, came to be here in this little Central African village in the heart of the African jungle must have bewildered him considerably.

On either side of him stood two huge blacks, each with a gleaming rifle slung across his shoulder, and a long whip tucked into his waist-belt. They were clearly of an altogether different tribe from that of the occupants of the village, at whom they were glancing in contempt, as the latter grovelled around them.

Figgins saw that even Kala, the witch-doctor, and the fat old chief were prostrate before the mysterious newcomers. The rest of the village had either made themselves scarce altogether, or were prostrating themselves, moaning as if in terror.

"And who are you, my young friends?"

The purring voice of the mysterious white man was smooth and bland. His teeth flashed in a silky smile, as he glanced from one to the other.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were still looking pale and shaken from their terrible experience. Figgins laughed in a strained way.

"You came in the nick of time, sir!" he said quietly.

"I am delighted to have been of service," purred the other, with another flashing smile. "But, tell me, who are you, and how in the name of all that is wonderful did you come to be here?"

Briefly Figgins explained.

The natives were still grovelling and moaning round the tall white man with the sallow face and flashing eyes, as he listened with a curious expression to Figgins' explanation.

"So!" he murmured softly. "From an airship, eh? Queer that I saw nothing of this airship, my young friends. It must have passed not far from my domain."

He ran thin white fingers along his moustache, his eyes glittering thoughtfully.

He turned to where the chieftain lay prostrate, face down before him, and spoke a few curt words in some native tongue. The chieftain answered with a breathless, frightened torrent of explanation. The mysterious white man laughed softly.

"I see! My young friends, it may interest you to know that it was on my account that you were to die so painfully!"

"But—but who are you?" broke in Fatty Wynn breathlessly.

"My name is Da Rosa—at your service. My nationality is Portuguese. I can assure you that I am delighted to make your acquaintance!"

There was a queer, sinister ring in the softly spoken words that warned both the New House juniors that, as a matter of fact, the Portuguese was anything but delighted at having found them there in the native village. And the terror with which he was regarded by the blacks was so great as to be horrible. Figgins felt an odd tightening at his heart as his eyes met those of Da Rosa.

"We must have a talk," said the man abruptly. "Come this way."

He turned on his heel, striding towards the chieftain's hut. Figgins and Fatty Wynn followed him. Da Rosa brutally kicked aside one of the grovelling blacks and entered the hut. Inside he turned again to the two puzzled juniors with his flashing smile.

"You are wondering what I am doing here?" he murmured. "I will explain!"

He took from his pocket a long black cigar, and lit it, his eyes never leaving their faces.

"Did Ussungi, that fat fool of a chief, speak to you of the Valley of Thunder?"

"Yes!" Figgins nodded, with a quick glance at his chum. "We wondered what—"

"The Valley of Thunder," broke in the Portuguese softly, "is mine. I happened to discover some years ago that this particular valley, about ten miles up the river, is a

prolific diamond field. Wonderful diamonds, my young friends! Millions of pounds worth of the finest stones in the world! It is the noise of the blasting operations that has caused the natives to name it the Valley of Thunder."

"I see," nodded Figgins. "But—"

"You wonder, perhaps, why the natives fear it?" Da Rosa laughed softly. There was something horrible in his laugh. "It is for this reason! As you can imagine, I did not wish my discovery to be known to the outside world. As you may know, the diamond business is a very closely-guarded one—if I made my discovery known, I might well find myself unable to market my goods. No need to explain in detail. Besides, there might be difficulties about concessions, and so forth. Therefore, I have said nothing to any man, except my few white assistants, of my wonderful find!"

He blew a thin ring of coiling smoke, and laughed again. "This part of Africa is practically unexplored. There is no danger of my workings being discovered if I am careful. But I need men to work for me. If I bring labour here, the secret will leak out to the coast. That is what I do not want. Therefore, I employ forced labour, my young friends."

"Forced labour?" echoed Figgins. "You—you mean—"

"Slaves!" said Da Rosa carelessly.

Figgins drew a gasping breath.

Though he knew that there were still slaves in Africa, in Abyssinia, the black kingdom on the eastern side of the dark continent, he had never credited that a white man could be guilty of that appalling crime against humanity. He stared at Da Rosa in wide-eyed horror.

"You seem surprised, my young friends," smiled the Portuguese silkily. "But why should I not employ slaves?"

No one can discover it! I have in my employ a number of Aggolas—one of the strongest and most fearless tribes of the Upper Congo. You have seen some of them outside. I pay them well, and they assist me. Thanks to them, I am able to help myself to as many slaves as I want from these dogs of Dakkans—the tribe to whom

the men of this village belong! You have seen for yourselves that they are in terror of me. They know that my arrival means that this village is surrounded even now by Aggolas—and they know that my coming means that I have come for more slaves for the Valley of Thunder!"

A cruel laugh broke from his thin, smiling lips, the long cigar clenched between his flashing white teeth.

"I make my slaves work hard," he purred. "They die off with unfortunate rapidity! Of late there has been disease in the valley, and I am short of slaves. I have come here to-day to take twenty men back with me from this village."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were surveying the Portuguese with utter horror.

Though he had been the cause of their lives being saved, they could feel nothing for him but loathing and disgust. He evidently read their looks, for he laughed mockingly.

"You are a little shocked, I fear?"

"But it's ghastly!" panted Fatty Wynn fiercely. "Horrible! Slavery is the foulest crime under the sun!"

"I fail to agree!" purred Da Rosa, with a shrug. "I realise, however, that the outside world thinks as you think. For that reason, I am, as I say, keeping the whole thing a very strict secret. No white men ever come to these parts—it is not difficult, therefore, to keep this secret to myself."

"Then why have you told us?" cried Figgins hoarsely.

Already a suspicion of the terrible truth had leapt into his brain.

"Because, my young friends," answered Da Rosa softly, "you are about to see me collect my new slaves. You would, if you returned to your friends—who otherwise can never find you—tell them what you know. For that reason, I have already decided that you shall never return to your friends. As far as they are concerned, you have been swallowed by the jungle never to be seen again! Therefore, I can speak to you freely. You understand?"

"What do you mean?" breathed Figgins.

His face, like the face of his chum, had gone deathly pale. He recoiled a step instinctively.

"I mean just what I say," smiled Da Rosa. "You know too much. Therefore you must never be allowed to return with what you know to your friends on board this airship."

He shrugged.

"One way out of the difficulty, of course, would be to kill you. After all, you nearly died just now, when the fools

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out there were going to sacrifice you to their gods, their crazy witch-doctor having told them that if they did, the gods would slay me for them! But I do not intend to kill you. Oh, no! As I have said, I am short of slaves. You are both strong, lusty youngsters. Therefore I shall take you to the valley, with twenty black men I have come for."

He paused, glancing from Figgins to his chum with mocking eyes.

"You shall come to the valley," he repeated silkily. "And there you shall become my slaves!"

CHAPTER 8.

In the Hands of the Slaver!

F IGGINS and Fatty Wynn stared at Da Rosa as if they could not believe their ears.

His cold-blooded, mocking tones had struck an icy chill to their hearts. They knew at last what Ussungi, the chieftain of the village, had meant by the Valley of Thunder! They knew, too, why he and his people were in such terror of the white men of the dreaded valley.

And they were to suffer the fate that Da Rosa had meted out to so many of Ussungi's people—slavery!

"You hound!" panted Figgins. "You fiend—"

"Silence!" snarled Da Rosa.

The smile had gone from the face of the Portuguese. His handsome, cruel face had set in fierce lines. He clapped his hands, and two of his physically splendid Aggolas came striding into the hut. He said something in a native dialect, and the giant blacks promptly seized Figgins and Fatty Wynn in a vice-like grip.

"Hands off!" cried Figgins, struggling desperately. "Hands off, you hounds!"

Da Rosa laughed, and strode out into the sunlight after them as they were dragged from the hut helpless in the grip of the two grinning Aggolas.

In the clearing in the centre of the ring of huts, a strange sight met the eyes of the two vainly struggling St. Jim's juniors.

A score of the Dakkans, the men of Ussungi's tribe whom Da Rosa's Aggolas had selected during their master's talk with the juniors in the hut, were standing sullenly in the clearing, square, wooden collars locked round their necks. Each man was fastened by his collar to the man next him with a short length of chain, in single file.

At a word from Da Rosa one of the Aggolas strode forward with two more collars and lengths of chain. The collars were fastened round the necks of the two white juniors, and they were roughly yoked to the end of the line of slaves.

Da Rosa said something to his men. The Aggolas—more than a score of them were in the clearing now—cracked their whips, and the line of slaves moved off in sullen despair towards the trees, following the tall figure of the Portuguese.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn, helplessly chained to the line, had to follow!

Watched by the miserable faces of Ussungi and the rest of his people, with the women of the village moaning and crying out, urged on by the cracking whips of the Aggolas, with their chains clinking mournfully, Da Rosa's new slaves vanished into the gloom of the giant trees—on their way to the dreaded Valley of Thunder!

And among them went the two juniors from far-off St. Jim's!

That ten-mile march through the humid heat of the jungle, yoked like cattle, seemed to Figgins and his chum more like a nightmare than stark reality.

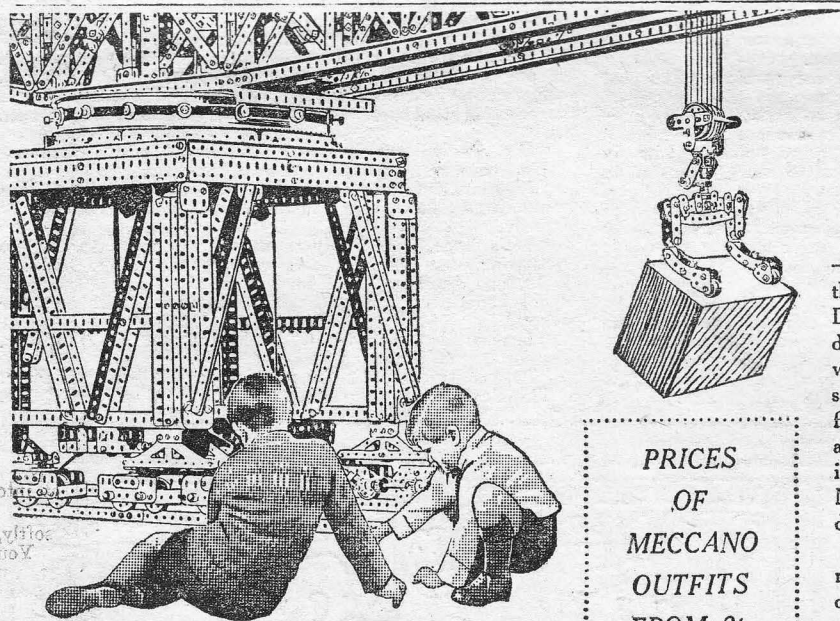
If ever they faltered, the long whips of the watchful Aggolas soon came hissing round their legs, to prevent them from slowing down the pace of the long file. It seemed as though the march would never end. But at last they came out from the trees into a rocky gorge, strewn with boulders, along which they were marched for half a mile or so. Then, turning a jutting shoulder of rock, they came to the Valley of Thunder!

It was a desolate-looking spot, shut in by high walls of cliff, with a shallow stream running through it. At the farther end were a number of huts, and working everywhere were gangs of blacks, chained together like themselves, guarded by the silent figures of men of the Aggola tribe, each of whom was armed with a rifle and a whip.

As they filed into the dreaded valley, a deep, thunderous rumble echoed out from cliff to cliff. A great section of rock came tumbling down; blasting operations were evidently in progress.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn, faint and ill, scarcely noticed their surroundings, however.

(Continued on next page.)



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During that long march they had come to realise, with hopeless bitterness, how vain it was to try to escape their fate.

The slightest resistance would mean the whip!

The new slaves were marched into a compound in the shadow of one of the cliffs, where they were allowed to fling themselves down wearily.

They had only once been given water on their journey from the village, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn were parched with thirst. But water was brought to them now, and some food—a meagre quantity of hashed vegetables. When they had eaten, Da Rosa appeared.

He went along the line of chained men, accompanied by a swarthy Portuguese, whose name seemed to be Chortz. The slaves were chosen for various work, and retrained accordingly, in gangs of five and six.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn stared up at Da Rosa with burning eyes as the Portuguese halted before them, surveying them, with a mocking smile.

"You fiend!" panted Figgins thickly.

"Silence, young dog!" snarled the man named Chortz, and brought his whip lashing down across the junior's shoulder.

Fatty Wynn cried out fiercely. Da Rosa laughed.

"You had better learn obedience, my young friends," he purred silkily. "Remember always that now you belong to me—utterly!"

He gave a curt command in Portuguese, and strode away.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were unchained from the line of blacks, and led away, still yoked together, to be fastened to four broken-spirited blacks who were working at the water's edge, sifting rubble for diamonds.

Chortz, the Portuguese, grinned maliciously.

"Get to work!" he growled, in broken English. "Every diamond you find place here!"

He raised his whip threateningly, as Figgins and Fatty Wynn looked like refusing.

But to refuse was useless, they knew. Without a word they picked up the sieves that were provided for them, and set to work. The four blacks to whom they were chained were paying no attention to them, after their first surprise at seeing that the two white slaves in their gang had brought the whip of a tall Aggola hissing across their backs. They worked with a dumb despair, like animals.

"Keep your pecker up, old chap!" muttered Figgins hoarsely.

The black man to whom he was fastened picked a huge glittering diamond from his sieve, and tossed it uninterestedly on to the little pile behind him.

That the valley was thick with the precious stones, of amazing size and quality, was clear enough. Da Rosa must have been making his fortune in the Valley of Thunder—wealth almost beyond the dreams of avarice!

And Figgins and Fatty Wynn were to help him in amassing his ill-gotten riches—were to work for him in chains, counted among his slaves!

The knowledge of that amazing, ghastly fact seemed to numb their brains, stupefying them, so that even now they could not realise the full horror of their lot.

One hope only was left to them!

They knew that the St. Jim's party from the great airship would leave no stone unturned to find them.

Yet how could they hope that their friends from the S 1000 would find them, here in this lonely corner of the wilds, shut in on all sides by almost impenetrable jungle?

A low groan escaped from Figgins as he toiled on at his chum's side, in the blazing heat of the African sun.

He knew only too well, as Fatty Wynn also knew, that their chances of being found and rescued by the party from the airship were no more than one in a thousand!

CHAPTER 9.

On the Trail!

"BAI Jove! It's wotten!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, spoke in deeply troubled tones.

Most of the juniors of the airship party were gathered in the lower promenade deck. The S 1000 was hovering almost motionless, head to the slight wind, her huge propellers turning slowly, keeping her practically motionless in the air above the little clearing in which Figgins and Fatty Wynn had landed in the night.

The two parachutes could be seen below—Figgins' lying in the open, Fatty Wynn's caught up and torn among the branches of some trees.

But of the two missing New House juniors there had been no sign, not since dawn had broken and the anxious search for them had begun.

By means of a trailing rope-ladder Sir Napier Wynter and Mr. Railton, Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and three other Sixth-Formers, had made a risky landing from the hovering dirigible. That had been some hours ago. They had signalled from the ground that they had been unable to find any trace of the vanished youngsters, after a brief search. Now they had set off with some members of the airship's crew to scour the surrounding jungle. They had been gone a long time—it was now past midday. There had been no further sight of them since they had vanished into the trees, armed with rifles, for the continuance of their search.

What could have happened to Figgins and his chum was a staggering mystery to those on board the airship, as well as to the members of the search-party.

"It's amazing!" muttered Jack Blake, staring down through the long mica windows at the tangled green of the jungle beneath. "They've vanished off the face of the earth, somehow or other! Hang it, it's like black magic!"

The faces of the juniors were all deeply troubled.

That some harm had come to Figgins and Fatty Wynn was obvious enough. In their hearts there was not one of the fellows gathered on the deck who did not believe that the two New House juniors must have been dragged off into the forest by wild beasts. But the fact that no sign of any such tragedy having taken place could be found, apparently, by those below, still caused them to hope desperately that even yet the missing juniors might turn up.

"If a lion had got them——" muttered Monty Lowther.

He broke off, with a shudder.

"If that had happened, surely there would have been something to show what had happened," put in Tom Merry quietly.

"Let's hope they simply went into the forest to shin up a tree or something, to be safe while they waited for daylight, and got lost," said Levison of the Fourth, trying to speak hopefully. "If so, they'll be found all right sooner or later."

"I guess that may be it," nodded Cyrus K. Hancock, the American junior.

"Pray Heaven that's the solution to it," breathed Kerr. The Scottish youngster's face was drawn and pale. He,

Potts, The Office Boy!



even more than the others, had felt the shock of Figgins' and Fatty Wynn's disappearance.

There was a sudden excited cry from Grundy.

"Here they come!"

The rescue party had appeared at last from the edge of the trees. But the fact that they were returning without any sign of Figgins and Fatty Wynn brought a groan of disappointment from the juniors staring down from the hovering dirigible.

Led by Sir Napier Wynter, the members of the search-party came swarming one by one up the swaying rope ladder that trailed down into the clearing. The baronet appeared a minute later at the end of the deck, and the juniors hurried towards him.

"Any news, sir?" panted Dick Redfern.

Sir Napier glanced at the juniors and paused in the doorway of the main saloon. His tanned face was very grave.

He nodded.

"Yes. We have found traces of them, we think; at least, there are traces of a band of savages having passed this way, and, judging from certain signs, we believe that they were carrying Figgins and Wynn with them—prisoners, I suppose. Unfortunately, the tracks ended at a river, and we could follow them no farther."

There was an excited chorus of exclamations. A wave of relief had swept over the juniors. Though the news was bad in one way, and startling, it was, at any rate, far better than it might have been. If Figgins and his chum had fallen into the hands of savages, the chances were that they were still alive—could be rescued.

"Gwreat Scott!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Savages!"

Sir Napier disappeared into the saloon, followed by Mr. Railton and the Sixth-Formers, who had also entered the deck by now. They were on their way to consult with Commander Dawson, the captain of the airship.

A brief conference was held. The result came to be unanimous—that the boats that the airship carried must be utilised in the search, and that strong, armed search-parties must proceed at once both up and down the river in hunt of the missing juniors and their captors.

Accordingly, not so very long afterwards, three canoes were creeping down the river along which the long canoe of the Dakkans had proceeded hours before with Figgins and Fatty Wynn on board as prisoners.

In the front canoe was Sir Napier Wynter with his nephew, Eric Kildare, Darrell, and North of the Sixth. In the second were Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, Smith major, Lee and Cutts of the same Form. The third canoe contained Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

They were all armed with rifles, and were keeping a keen look-out for any possible landing-place that might have been utilised by the missing juniors' mysterious captors.

Another party, including Tom Merry & Co., had set off up the river under the leadership of Mr. Railton.

Blake & Co.'s eyes were gleaming excitedly as they paddled on through the humid, misty heat between the crocodile-infested banks. For miles there had been no spot at which any human being could possibly have effected a landing.

That their search might well involve them in a fight with natives they knew well enough. At first, in fact, Sir Napier and Mr. Railton had seemed very dubious about allowing any but Sixth and Fifth-Formers to join in the search. But they had given way at last to the pleadings of the eager juniors.

"If it comes to a scrap with some blessed niggers," muttered Blake, glancing at the rifle lying between his feet, "we'll jolly well show 'em they can't kidnap a couple of our chaps without getting it in the neck!"

"Yaas, watahah!"

From the front canoe there came a sudden shout, in the voice of Eric Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's had flung out a pointing hand as the canoe in which he was seated had shot round another of the bewildering twists in the river, to reveal a native village at the water's edge—Ussungi's village, had they only known it—from which Figgins and Fatty Wynn had been marched in chains by the villainous Portuguese only a couple of hours before.

The arrival of Sir Napier Wynter and his party was a shock to the fat chieftain, Ussungi.

Scared as he still was as a result of Da Rosa's visit, and in terror lest these strange white visitors would exact vengeance if they learnt of the fate of the two youngsters whom his men had brought prisoners to him, and whom he had allowed Da Rosa to take as slaves, Ussungi denied all knowledge of the missing juniors to Sir Napier.

His protests were so vehement that the baronet came to the conclusion, after closely questioning the chief, that the man was speaking the truth.

"We're on the wrong track, apparently," he said, turning to Kildare, who was standing near with the rest of the party.

Heavily armed as they all were, the Dakkans had made no attempt at hostility; besides, they were thoroughly cowed at the sight of a white man, in any case, thanks to the reign of terror that Da Rosa had brought about among the tribe. It was only because Figgins and Fatty Wynn had been only boys that Ussungi's men had dared bring them captive to their chief.

"Let's hope Mr. Railton's party have better luck," said Kildare, with a rather despairing shrug. "But—"

He broke off. There had come a sudden excited shout from Digby.

"My hat! Look!"

Dig was pointing excitedly to a torn shred of cloth lying near some faggots piled by one of the huts. By now the stakes at which the two white youngsters were to have been burnt as sacrifices to the gods of the Dakkans had been taken down; but the faggots were still to be seen.

And among the sticks was a piece of blue-and-white striped cloth—part of a pyjama jacket! And Digby had recognised it as the pattern of the pyjamas that he knew Figgins to have been wearing the night before.

"Figg's pyjamas—I'll swear it!" gasped Dig excitedly, snatching up the shred of cloth.

"Good gad!" Kildare gave a breathless exclamation. "You know that? Then the youngsters have been here!"

He turned a grim face to Ussungi. The fat old chief was looking thoroughly flabbergasted at their discovery. His bloodshot eyes shifted uneasily before Kildare's angry gaze and the keen eyes of Sir Napier Wynter.

"What do you say to this, Ussungi?" snapped Sir Napier. "You have been lying to us!"

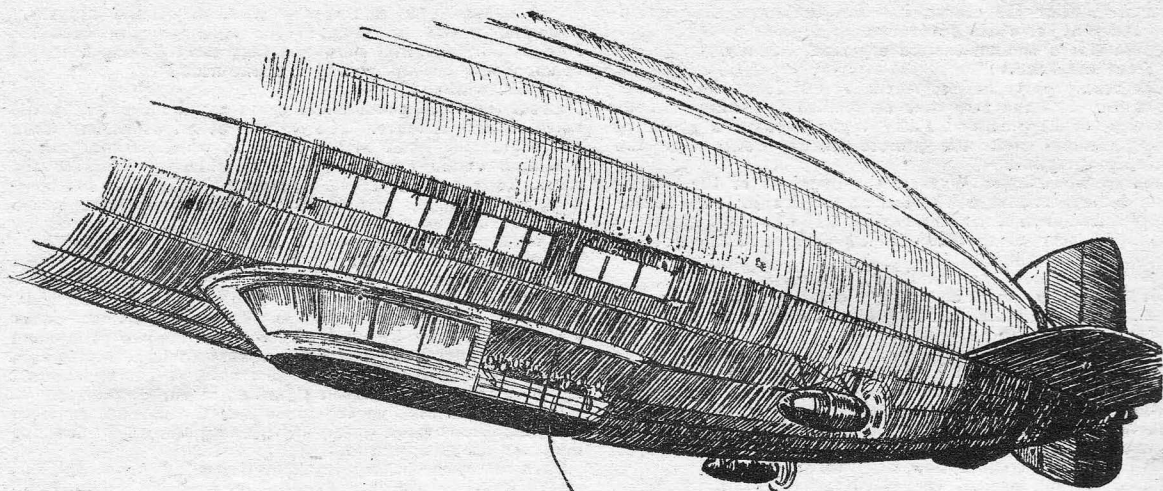
Ussungi was scared now that his secret had been discovered. He did not like the look in Sir Napier's face, nor the look of the gleaming Winchesters with which the white party were all armed.

He glanced round wildly. The silent crowd of blacks that had gathered in a ring round their chieftain and the white visitors were looking distinctly uneasy, too.

"The white man wise," mumbled Ussungi. "He know all—no good lie! Yes, white boys here. But they gone!"

"Nailed."





"Where have they gone, you black villain?" snapped Sir Napier fiercely, striding forward and grasping the chief's naked arm in vice-like fingers. "Don't lie to me further or it will be the worse for you!"

Mumblingly, with many uneasy glances at Sir Napier's set face but with his eyes on the ground for the most part, the fat chief blurted out the whole story in broken guttural tones. The party from the airship listened to breathless amazement. When the black man had finished his tale the baronet drew a deep breath.

"Good heavens!" He had let go his hold of the negro's arm. Now he gripped it again with steely fingers.

"Listen, Ussungi!" he said quietly. "You must lead us to this place, the Valley of Thunder!"

A look of terror leapt into the chieftain's face. He shook like a jelly and flung himself at Sir Napier's feet.

"No, no!" he gasped. "No go to Valley of Thunder! Dare not! No, no—"

"Don't be a fool!" said Sir Napier sternly. "White men are with you now. My palaver is as strong as palaver of the white men of the Valley of Thunder! I will take a strong party of white men, and you shall muster every man of the village to come with us. We will be a strong force, Ussungi, and we shall prevail over these evil ones!"

But for a long while Ussungi flatly refused to make any move against Da Rosa. The terror that the very name of the Portuguese inspired in him, and in the heart of all the Dakkans, was complete. Sir Napier Wynter argued and threatened and cajoled, however, and at long last he seemed to have succeeded in "winning his way" against the fat chieftain, as Blake muttered to his chums.

But even though he unwillingly consented to lead Sir Napier and a party from the airship to the dreaded Valley of Thunder, when Ussungi came to tell his men of what was proposed it was evident that they refused in a panic.

Ussungi turned hopelessly to Sir Napier. "They no go to Valley of Thunder!" he exclaimed. "They say palaver of white men of valley stronger than palaver of anyone!"

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Lefevre. "They won't go!" "I'll make 'em!" snapped Sir Napier.

He glanced round thoughtfully, with a dark frown. Suddenly his face cleared as his eyes fell on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. With a quick stride he crossed towards the swell of St. Jim's and drew him forward into the centre of the ring of murmuring black men.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—" "Put on that monacle of yours, D'Arcy!" muttered Sir Napier, with a grim smile.

"Oh, yaas, certainly! But—" Arthur Augustus, very astonished and bewildered, and scarlet with confusion as he found the eyes of the whole village fastened upon him, raised his monacle, which till then had been dangling at the end of its cord, and jammed it into his aristocratic eye. There was an instant hush of astonishment among the blacks.

Ussungi, too, was staring at the swell of St. Jim's with evident awe.

"There!" exclaimed Sir Napier. "Have any of you ever seen a youth with three eyes before? Is that not strong magic? Have the white men of the Valley of Thunder three eyes? No, none of them! I tell you, this youth with the three eyes is great witch-doctor! He



palaver strong magic. Ho will come with us, and you will see that we shall be stronger—far stronger—than the white men of the Valley of Thunder!"

"B-bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Sir Napiah—"

"My giddy aunt!" muttered Blake. "Look at 'em!" There was no doubt that Sir Napier Wynter had succeeded at last—thanks to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's famous monacle! The blacks, struck with awe at the sight of the swell of St. Jim's gleaming "third eye," had given a sudden wild shout, and prostrated themselves in a great circle around the astonished Arthur Augustus.

Even Ussungi had flopped on to his knee at the swell of St. Jim's feet, and was mumbling excitedly as he covered his face in salutation.

"G-gweat Scott!" "It is good!" cried Ussungi breathlessly. His men were all shouting wildly as they grovelled before Arthur Augustus. "My men will come! They see that the white strangers have great magic! They go to Valley of Thunder!"

"That is good!" said Sir Napier Wynter. "They have chosen well!"

Despite himself, he grinned as he glanced at Eric Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's was smiling, too, and so were the others, though they were all careful not to let the blacks see their amusement. Grave though the situation was, with Figgins and Fatty Wynn in the hands of the master of the valley of slaves, the sight of the overawed blacks prostrating themselves around the scarlet-countenanced Arthur Augustus was too funny!

"We will now send messages to the airship, Ussungi!" said Sir Napier quietly. "A strong force of armed warriors will come. Meanwhile, let your men prepare for the attack upon the valley! By dawn to-morrow the slaves of the Valley of Thunder shall every man be freed."

Though he spoke confidently, in his heart Sir Napier knew that a difficult, grim task lay before him. From what he had heard he realised that Da Rosa, with his strong following of Aggolas, would be a hard nut to crack.

But his words had their effect. The chieftain repeated them in his own tongue to his followers, and the blacks,

who had been so cowed and panic-stricken a few minutes before, leapt to their feet with wild yells, evidently fired with the bravery that they had so long lacked! They began a wild dance round the clearing, snatching up spears and shields, and yelling madly.

Da Rosa looked like getting a shock when the rescue force arrived at the Valley of Thunder, in a desperate attempt to free the miserable slaves who toiled there in chains under the whips of the Portuguese and his evil followers!

CHAPTER 10.
To the Rescue!

"F IGGY, old chap, are you awake?" Fatty Wynn muttered the words softly in the gloom.

He was lying on the earthen floor of one of the slaves' sleeping-huts—cramped, ill-ventilated holes in which the wretched victims of Da Rosa's villainy lay huddled, still chained together after their day's toil. More than a score of blacks were sleeping restlessly in the hut, in which the chain-gang of six to which Figgins and Fatty Wynn were fastened had been put for the night.

There was no answer from Figgins. His steady breathing came to his chum's ears. Figgins had fallen at last into restless slumber.

A groan of despair broke from Fatty Wynn's lips. The huddled blacks around them were stirring restlessly and muttering in their sleep. The clink of their chains could be heard as they moved continually. Fatty Wynn, the iron collar round his neck, galling his flesh, had been utterly unable to fall asleep despite the weariness of his limbs.

His hands had felt desperately at every link of the chain which fastened him to Figgins. But there was not a weak link in it—certainly not a link that could possibly be broken by even the hands of a full-grown man.

He twisted his head, staring with weary eyes towards the narrow opening of the hut.

The moon had not yet set behind the cliff that shut in the valley on the western side, and in the pale light he could see the dark figure of one of the giant Aggolas pacing noiselessly to and fro outside a rifle across his shoulder, a whip thrust into his waistband.

Even had Fatty Wynn had a file with which to attempt to free himself from his chain, escape would have been a hopeless chance, he realised.

The air in the hut was hot and stifling, and mosquitoes from the river filled the air, tormenting the wretched captives mercilessly.

And there was no escape! Day after day, month after month, most of the blacks in the hut had toiled in their chains—and the two white youngsters were to toil with them as more months passed. Fatty Wynn groaned aloud in utter misery.

All hope that the air-ship party would find them, and rescue them, had died within him hours before.

He closed his eyes. And at last sleep came.

Soon after dawn the slaves were given their meagre first meal and driven out in their gangs to toil for their master. Da Rosa himself appeared before long, superintending the work at the farther end of the gorge.

Fatty Wynn and Figgins, working at the edge of the stream with their sieves, still drew occasional curious stares from the black slaves with whom they had to work. But any pause in their toil brought the whips of the Aggolas upon their backs, so that not much attention was paid to the two white youngsters.

In any case, most of the slaves seemed too cowed and indifferent to everything to show much interest.

They had been working for two or three hours when a sudden excitement at the mouth of the gorge caused Figgins and his chum to glance up swiftly. An Aggola was racing across to where Da Rosa was talking to his second-in-command, the brutal-looking Portuguese named Chortz. He stopped before Da Rosa and began talking excitedly in his native tongue.

"Great Scott!" breathed Figgins. "What's happening?" At the mouth of the gorge the half-dozen black sentries, who were always posted there, were retreating into the gorge, shouting excitedly. The slave-driver in charge of the gang with which the two juniors were working was staring across towards the scene of the excitement intently, so that he did not seem to notice that the gang had stopped work to stare, too.

The next moment a breathless gasp escaped Figgins. He stared across the gorge as though he could not believe his eyes.

A wild cry burst from his lips.



The bullet missed its mark, and cut the rope which held the swaying Da Rosa!

Striding into view was the tall figure of Sir Napier Wynter, a rifle under his arm; he had not seen Figgins and Fatty Wynn as yet. He was heading straight for where Da Rosa stood, livid-faced, glaring at him in utter astonishment.

In the mouth of the gorge a crowd of Dakkans had halted, led by a number of familiar figures—Mr. Railton and Kildare, Darrell, and other Sixth-Formers, and members of the airships' crew.

In the valley, Da Rosa's Aggolas were rushing up from all sides to bar their path. A dozen of them had converged upon Sir Napier, their rifles levelled.

The baronet smiled coolly, and waved his hand towards his crowd of followers.

"Your name is Da Rosa?" he queried in a steely tone. "Then I should advise you to order your men not to molest me. You observe that I have not come alone!"

"Caramba!" panted Da Rosa. "Who are you?"

"My name is Wynter. I have come with an ultimatum to you. I demand that you free every man working here—among them, two white boys! If you refuse, it will be the worse for you!"

Da Rosa did not answer for some moments. His glittering eyes swept past Sir Napier to the crowd of Dakkans and white men in the mouth of the valley.

By now a powerful force of Aggolas barred their path, rifles gleaming in the sunlight.

A slow smile appeared on the handsome, evil face of the Portuguese.

"So!" he said, with an insolent, mocking smile. "You have brought those men to force me into unconditional surrender?" He laughed softly. "Perhaps you do not know that the Dakkans are a weak-kneed tribe, cowards every one! You would soon discover, I fear, that if you dared attack, they would be but a poor match for my Aggolas, even though they are led by white men!"

"We should see about that!" retorted Sir Napier curtly. "What do you reply to my demand, you scoundrel?"

Da Rosa's eyes glittered evilly. He took from his pocket one of his thin black cigars, bit off the end with gleaming white teeth, and lit it with an insolent carelessness.

"My reply to you," he said smoothly, "is that you had better return quickly to your friends over there—and leave this spot at once! I shall not free a single slave—not even the white boys whom you specially mentioned. I am master in this valley, and master I shall remain!"

"I warn you that we outnumber you!" snapped Sir Napier grimly.

The Portuguese shrugged.

"Dakkans?" he sneered. "They will fly at the first shot! You seem to have infused a little fire into them by some means, for the moment. But they are a cowardly lot, I can assure you. You will be a fool to urge them to attack."

"Is that your last word?"

"Certainly," nodded Da Rosa, with a sneer on his thin lips.

His eyes blazed into Sir Napier's. Despite his cool exterior, and his undoubted confidence that he and his men were more than a match for the band of Dakkans, although the latter were led by a number of whites, Da Rosa had had a nasty shock!

That his secret diamond workings were known now to other white men had staggered him. As yet, he had not made up his mind what to do. He hesitated to attempt to shoot down Sir Napier, and attack his followers—that would mean murder, and though the villainous Portuguese had no qualms in that direction, he was not going to risk hanging as a murderer until he had summed up the situation fully. Even in that lonely corner of Central Africa, Da Rosa knew that a man's crimes might find him out, and bring the long arm of Western law upon him.

From the edge of the stream, some distance away, Figgins and Fatty Wynn had watched the meeting of the two men in the centre of the gorge with almost dazed faces.

Their wildest hopes had come true! Their friends from the airship had found them! That they would rescue them, they did not for a moment doubt, in the first delirious joy that had gripped them.

And then Figgins found his voice.

He sent a hoarse shout ringing across the gorge. Sir Napier, at sound of it, swung round, and his face set in strange lines as he saw, several hundred yards away, the two youngsters for whom he had come in search.

His eyes blazed with a light that for the moment scared even Da Rosa, as he saw that Figgins and Fatty Wynn were chained to the gang of sullen, dispirited blacks. He seemed about to speak, but the words choked in his throat. The next moment his fist had shot out, straight from the shoulder, in his instinctive rush of rage. There was a sickening thud as it landed on the sallow chin of the mockingly smiling Portuguese.

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Da Rosa reeled, and crashed to earth, with a snarling incoherent cry.

"You villain!" burst out Sir Napier passionately. "By Heaven, you scoundrel, you shall pay for—"

He got no farther. One of the Aggolas, on seeing his master struck down, had whipped up his rifle. There was a sharp report, that echoed from cliff to cliff in the silence, and Sir Napier Wynter dropped to earth.

From Figgins and Fatty Wynn there broke sobbing cries of horror.

There were instant shouts of fury from the crowd of Dakkans in the mouth of the gorge. With the tall figure of Mr. Railton in front, and the handful of Sixth-Formers and the members of the airship's crew close on his heels, the Dakkans rushed forward.

There was a crash of rifle-fire as the line of Aggolas who had closed in between them and Sir Napier raised their weapons.

The next moment a desperate battle was raging in the mouth of the Valley of Thunder!

CHAPTER 11.

Da Rosa's Triumph!

CRACK, crack, crack! An unexpected fresh burst of firing rang out from the top of the cliffs that shut in the little valley, and several of the Aggolas who had been looking after the slave gangs, and were now rushing towards the fight, dropped in their tracks.

Not till then had Da Rosa known that Sir Napier Wynter had posted snipers on the cliff-tops on either side of the valley. It was another nasty shock!

It was the juniors from the airship, and the half-dozen Fifth-Formers, who were lying among the rocks on the top of the cliffs, firing down into the valley. Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., Talbot and Grundy, Levison and Clive, and Cardew, and Kit Wildrake, had all begged to be allowed to join the march on the Valley of Thunder. Sir Napier and Mr. Railton had allowed them to do so on the understanding that they did not join in the fighting that might result—until Tom Merry had suggested that they were posted on the cliff-tops to fire down at the enemy from the comparative safety of the rocks.

From there, they were already doing deadly work!

The unexpected danger from above had shaken the Aggolas considerably for the moment.

But they soon rallied, charging down upon the attackers with savage ferocity, and soon the two sides were so intermingled that the juniors could not fire without danger of hitting their friends.

At a word from Tom Merry, who was in charge of the band of snipers, the juniors ceased firing, the order being passed from one to another along the line of cliffs. They lay peering down with excited eyes into the little valley.

There was a breathless shout from Clive, the South African junior, as he saw Sir Napier Wynter rise slowly and dazedly to his feet.

The bullet had only grazed past his temple, knocking him out completely for a few moments. But now he was on his feet again. In the excitement, none of the enemy had noticed him stagger up, and he turned swiftly towards the spot by the water's edge where Figgins and Fatty Wynn were standing with the huddled, scared group of blacks.

Yoked as they were to the four Dakkans, it had been impossible for the two captive youngsters to get to their friends.

But before Sir Napier could reach them, he was headed off by four Aggolas, who closed in on him murderously. A gasping cry broke from Figgins—for the moment it looked as though Sir Napier were done for.

But a rush on the part of Kildare and some of the airship's crew, who had seen the baronet's danger, drove the Aggolas back, and once more Sir Napier was among his own side.

To get to Figgins and Fatty Wynn was impossible, however. The Aggolas fighting fiercely, some of them firing still, but most of them using their rifles as clubs, had come between the attackers and the scared gangs of slaves by the stream. And with Da Rosa and Chortz and two or three other Portuguese urging them on, the Aggolas were slowly driving their enemies back!

So far, the Dakkans had fought astonishingly well. But now that the first impetus of their attack was over, and they saw that they were being driven back, panic suddenly seized them.

Their old terror of Da Rosa and the Valley of Thunder seemed to come sweeping back in a moment. They broke and ran.

For Sir Napier and Mr. Railton, and the other white

men to have attempted to carry on the fight unaided would have been utter suicide. They fell back, fighting doggedly, many wounded; and one at least of the airship's crew was lying dead among the numerous huddled, lifeless figures of slain Dakkans who had fallen at the hands of the dreaded Aggolas.

Figgins groaned in horror. Back towards the mouth of the little valley the attackers were being driven!

The retreat turned to a rout, as Ussungi's men poured in terror-stricken swarms through the mouth of the gorge, dropping their weapons as they ran, leaving spears and shields and rifles—some of them had been armed from the airship's store of firearms—strewn behind them. And their white leaders had to go with them. To have attempted to remain would have meant certain death.

Shouting and yelling, the triumphant Aggolas swept in pursuit. They drove their enemies out between the great jutting shoulders of rock that flanked the entrance to the

were far too few to launch a successful assault upon Da Rosa and his warriors.

"It's no good," groaned Fatty Wynn. He lifted his hands, to tear in despairing fury at the chain that held him. Then his hands dropped to his sides. He heard a soft laugh near him and glanced round to find the glittering eyes of Da Rosa fastened upon him and his chum.

"So!" snarled the Portuguese. "Your friends were cleverer than I thought, I will admit, in that they found where you were! But their attempt to rescue you has failed, you see! They will never find allies among the tribes to be a match for my men!"

Figgins faced the Portuguese with blazing eyes. His fists were clenched so that the knuckles showed white.

"What if their attempt has failed?" he cried hoarsely. "They will go to the coast and tell their story. Before long they will return, with soldiers from the Gold Coast—"

"Perhaps," smiled Da Rosa, with a shrug. "But it will

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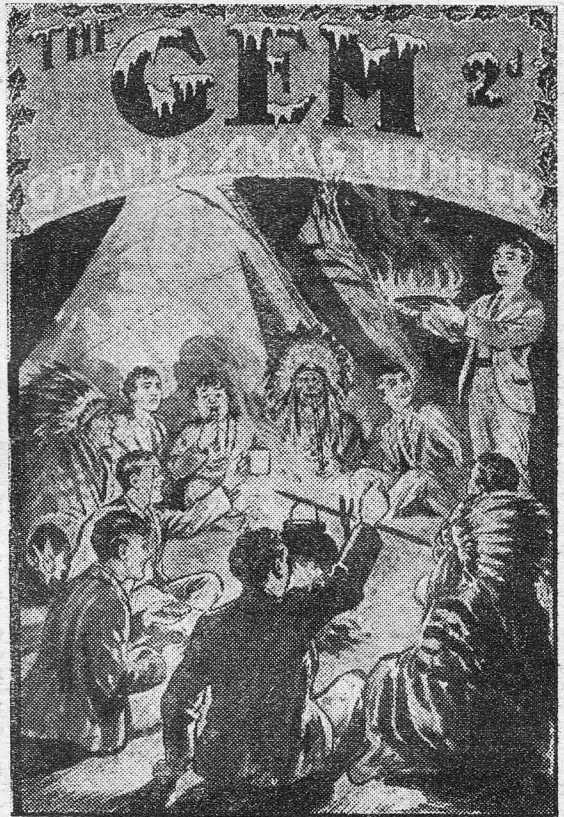
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valley, and the sounds of the pursuit grew fainter to the ears of the slave gangs.

The juniors on the cliff-tops had vanished, raving to join their friends in the vain hope of stemming the retreat. But it was an impossible attempt.

The attack had failed! Sir Napier Wynter's force, as Da Rosa had prophesied, had failed him. The Portuguese was left in triumph—and Figgins and Fatty Wynn were still in bondage!

Utter misery had gripped them. Their rescue had seemed certain; but all their hopes had faded like a dream.

Figgins turned a miserable face to his chum. He could not speak.

They both realised, in that terrible moment as their eyes met, that though Sir Napier had managed to persuade the Dakkans to fight at last against the tyranny of the evil Portuguese, now that the attack on the dreaded valley had failed, Ussungi's men would never have the pluck to repeat their attempt. And without their aid, the airship party

take a long time, my young friends. It is not the work of a moment—no, nor of a day—to persuade the military to act. And though your airship seems to be large, I am not afraid of the number of soldiers that could be brought in it. Oh, no! A strong force would have to march here, through many hundreds of miles of swamp and jungle, before you will be freed! Before then my work will be finished—and you will have toiled for me for many months! I shall have gone before the soldiers come, my young friends. And you, perhaps," he added with sudden malicious cruelty, "will no doubt have died in your chains, as other slaves stronger than you have died working for me!"

Figgins did not answer. Despair choked him. Da Rosa laughed evilly.

"To work, young dogs!" he snarled, snatching the whip from his belt. "To work, or—"

He raised the whip. There were gasps of terror from the blacks of the chain-gang, who turned hastily to their

sieves and began working feverishly sifting the piles of rubble for the precious gems. Figgins and Fatty Wynn followed suit wearily.

Resistance was useless enough, they knew only too well. Da Rosa lowered the whip, and laughed softly.

Already some of the Aggolas were returning to the gorge after their triumphant fight. There was no danger of a return of the Dazkans! Of that they were confident, as was the Portuguese.

The dead were dragged away for burial. Most of them had been attacking blacks—only a few of the defenders had fallen. An hour later the slave-gangs were toiling under the watchful eyes of their guard with the same despondent hopelessness as of old. There was no sign in the Valley of Thunder that an attempt had been made to rescue them!

What would Sir Napier and his friends do?

That was the question that hammered in the brains of the two captive St. Jim's youngsters, as they toiled in the burning sunlight.

What could he do but take news to the coast? And then, as Da Rosa had said, a long time must elapse before a sufficient force could arrive on the scene to overcome Da Rosa's little army of ebony warriors. By that time—

But what would have happened by that time, Figgins dared not think!

CHAPTER 12.

Out of the Sky!

NIGHT came at last, with an end for a few hours at least in the back-breaking toil of Da Rosa's captives. They were driven back to the reeking sleeping-huts, to drop to the earthen floors dog-weary.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn fell asleep almost instantly this time, utterly tired out. In what seemed a flash of time, they had awakened again to find dawn breaking over the Valley of Thunder, and another day of toil before them.

In less than an hour they were at work by the edge of the little stream under the watchful eyes of one of the huge Aggolas.

The two juniors had scarcely spoken to one another. The soul-destroying wretchedness of their slavery was already numbing their senses to the animal-like submissiveness that characterised the blacks to whom they were chained.

The tall, white-clad figure of Da Rosa, a long cigar clenched between his gleaming white teeth, was busy superintending blasting operations at the farther end of the valley. The thunderous rumble of the explosives and the falling rock echoed out again and again between the towering cliffs.

After a time, the Portuguese strolled across towards the stream and stood watching Figgins and Fatty Wynn at work for some minutes with a malicious grin upon his sallow face.

"Your friends have not paid you another visit, you see!" he murmured mockingly.

Figgins glanced towards him, but did not speak. He was too sick at heart for speech. Da Rosa laughed softly and strolled away.

"Listen!"

The sudden hoarse whisper came from Fatty Wynn a moment later.

"What's up?" muttered Figgins, glancing quickly towards his chum.

Fatty Wynn was staring skywards. The Aggola in charge of them gave a guttural exclamation and cracked his long whip menacingly at seeing two of the slaves pause in their toil. But Fatty Wynn's face had gone excited, and he did not heed the evil-faced black.

"Listen!" he gasped. "I thought I heard—"

Crack!

The cruel whip came hissing down across his shoulders. He cried out; and suddenly George Figgins saw red!

He sprang to his feet, swinging round on the guard with blazing eyes. A choking, despairing rage had gripped him. Before the man could raise the whip again, Figgins' knotted fist had crashed full on to his jaw.

The black man reeled, with a snarling gasp. The next instant the whip had been dragged from his astonished grasp.

"You hound!" panted Figgins, in mad, sobbing fury.

The next moment the New House youngster had brought the whip lashing across the gigantic black man's evil face.

The Aggola cried out and staggered, blinded. Again the whip hissed round him, and he lost his balance, tumbling at Figgins' feet.

Lash, lash, lash!

The black man writhed and shrieked. But Figgins was merciless—that cruel lashing of his chum had maddened

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him. Not till the Aggola lay groaning and inert at his feet did George Figgins fling down the whip.

"There!" he panted. "You can kill me for it; but it's been thundering well worth it!"

Furious shouts had rung out from other guards as they saw what had taken place. At first they had been too dumbfounded to move. But now half a dozen of them came racing across towards the edge of the stream. Figgins faced them with set face and clenched fists. There was a cry of fury from Da Rosa. But the Aggolas did not reach Figgins to avenge their evil comrade!

Borne on the light wind, a sudden hum from the sky had come to the ears of those in the little valley. It was the sound that Fatty Wynn's keen ears had heard already.

Struck with astonishment, the Aggolas who had been closing on Figgins halted, staring up.

Da Rosa, too, had come to a standstill, his glittering black eyes raised skywards, with a startled expression in their cruel depths.

From Fatty Wynn there broke a wild shout.

"Look! The airship!"

Over the opposite cliff, gleaming like silver in the blazing African sunlight, the beautiful streamlined shape of the S 1000 had come slowly into view, its shadow almost filling the floor of Da Rosa's valley. It was flying low, its engines droning deeply. From the Aggolas there came a chorus of scared shrieks.

That they had never seen an airship in their lives before was obvious.

Though they were cruel, evil scoundrels, no one could ever have accused their tribe of cowardice. But the sight of the S 1000 terrified them.

Dropping their whips and rifles, they raced, in panic fear, for the huts.

There was a breathless, furious yell from Da Rosa, who was standing in the centre of the gorge, staring up with blazing eyes at the great silver shape circling above his head. He turned suddenly and snatched up one of the rifles dropped by his terror-stricken men and thrust the butt into his shoulder, the gleaming barrel levelled at the row of staring faces that looked down from above.

But he did not press the trigger!

A coil of rope had come snaking down from the airship. It was flying very low, hovering almost motionless—low enough for Cyrus K. Handcock, the American junior, who was an expert with a lasso, to rope the Portuguese with amazing skill. The whizzing noose dropped clean over Da Rosa's shoulders and was jerked taut.

He gave a gasping cry, and the rifle was jerked from his hands. The next moment the Portuguese found himself swaying dizzily in mid-air, being slowly drawn up towards the hovering airship!

Chortz and the other Portuguese watched their leader's amazing plight with dumb consternation.

"Caramba!" Da Rosa's sallow face had gone ashen grey. He clutched frantically at the rope as he swung higher, drawn up by strong hands from above. "Por Dios—"

He was thirty feet from the ground now, swaying slowly at the end of the rope in helpless terror.

He raised terror-stricken eyes. From the open trap in the floor of the airship's lowest deck he saw grim faces staring down. One of them was Cyrus K. Handcock. Another he recognised as being the face of Sir Napier Wynter.

"I fancy we have the advantage over you now, Da Rosa!" called down Sir Napier grimly. "If we choose, we could drop you to earth to be smashed like a jelly!"

A wail of utter terror broke from the Portuguese's ashen lips.

"However," went on Sir Napier's cool voice, "I don't propose to do that—richly though you deserve it—unless you refuse my instructions!"

"What—what do you want me to do?" wailed Da Rosa, as he swayed dizzily in mid-air below them.

"You will order your scoundrels to free every one of the slaves this instant!" commanded Sir Napier grimly. "Shout loud, and they will hear you!"

Da Rosa did not pause to argue. He obeyed, and sent a wild shout ringing out across the gorge. In answer to it the Aggolas emerged, scared and bewildered, from the shelter of the huts.

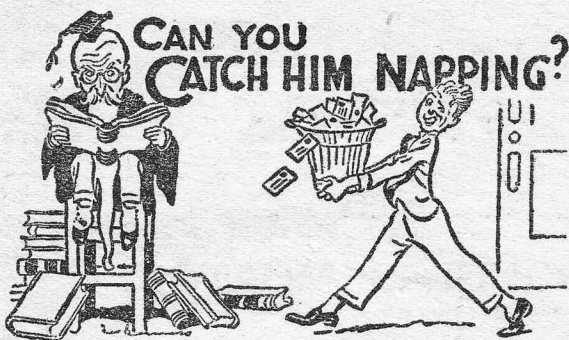
The Portuguese screamed orders to them from his dizzy perch, and the black men, seeing that their master could be dashed to death by his enemies if they refused to obey, hastened to carry out his commands.

With their keys, they hastily hurried from gang to gang unlocking the iron collars. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were among the first to be freed.

"You are a sensible man, Da Rosa!" called down Sir Napier dryly.

"Let me down!" sobbed the Portuguese.

(Continued on page 28.)



Our Whiskery Oracle's as old as the hills, but his memory's even older. Ask him a question, and he'll answer it.

THE old Editor caught me this morning, chums, and no mistake. I was standing on a pile of Annuals, fixing a few sprigs of holly round the enlargement of himself that hangs on the north wall of the sanctum. I thought it would please the old boy to see a bit of Christmas decoration round his portrait. It's a magnificent portrait, and hangs next to a picture of a cheesemite defending its young, done in water colour. I stuck some paper chains round the cheesemite, just to cheer him up a bit, though he might not think it's the cheese. Anyhow, to get back to the subject—or, rather, the object, which is the Editor's portrait. Some object!

My object was to make him look nice and Christmassy, but when he came in and saw me perched on the jolly old Annuals, he objected to my object, and ordered me to get down. "If you want to hang holly round the room," roared the Ed., "just get some steps!" Then he took several steps towards me, and I threw the mistletoe at him. Then he threw a missile, too—I think it was an ink-well—anyway, it missed me, and fell against the picture of the cheesemite. The result is that what was originally intended by the artist for a chunk of creamy American cheddar, now looks like a piece of very over-ripe gorgonzola. After a bit of a set-too, the old Ed. ordered me to leave the Christmas decorations alone.

"I must put a few bits of holly up," said I.

"Hang the holly!" roared the Ed.

"That's just what I'm doing, sir," I told him, "and, by the way, what would you like for a Christmas present?"

"A box of cigars, my lad, and a little civility. What d'you want me to give you this year?"

"Well, sir," I replied, looking very modestly at the carpet. "I did think I'd like a pair of roller skates."

At this the dear old Ed. burst into a loud guffaw.

"Don't be silly," said he. "How can you get round a rink, with all your wrinkles. Rink again—I mean, think again."

While I was thinking what I could sting the Ed. for next, he produced the usual bundle of queries from GEM readers and began searching for a teaser among them to get me groggy.

"Now, then, my lad," said he, "just collect your wits and all those pieces of mistletoe on the floor, and tell Tom Wade, a Wokingham reader, something about pirates. Know anything about pirates?"

"I should say I do, sir." I then fucked my whiskers into my waistcoat

and drew a deep breath. "Pirates," I began, "have been on the job, as you might say, from the earliest times. Julius Caesar was once captured by pirates in the Mediterranean. That was rough luck on Julius, but he managed to get free, and afterwards captured the whole crew, and put them to death. Many people imagine that pirates confined their nefarious operations to the seas round Africa, and the East generally, but in the fifteen hundreds, English ships often engaged in piracy, a notable instance being that of the ships of New Romney, that often sailed out and attacked the Yarmouth boats."

I could see the old Ed. was looking interested, so I continued.

"During the seventeenth century, one of the most famous meeting places for pirates was Turtle Island, in the West Indies, and one of the most famous pirates was Bartholomew Roberts, a Welshman, who captured over 400 ships during his career, and died fighting. The only pirates that are left nowadays are Chinese, who set to work by shipping themselves on to coastal steamers as coolie passengers, and then, at a given signal, hold up the captain and the crew at the point of their revolvers. After that the ship is navigated to some secret bay, and plundered, while the passengers are held up for ransom."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Ed. "And have you ever travelled in China, Whiskers?"

"No, sir, I have not; but my father used to travel in fly-papers, and very well he did, too," I told him. "When the flies saw my old man coming, they used to buzz off, believe me."

"Well, now, just tell Harry Grahame, of Blackheath, whether a sled should be called a sled or a sledge."

"That's quite a matter of taste, sir. A sled, or sledge, which is a vehicle on runners used for travelling on over ice, is also known as a sleigh, which is pronounced slay."

"I see." The Ed. picked up another letter. "What is a ghetto?"

"The part of a town in which Jews live, sir, is called the ghetto."

"Tim Morgan asks us what pampas grass is."

"A coarse grass found on the pampas with feathery spikes eight or nine feet in height."

"And what are the pampas, exactly, my learned lump of hairiness?"

"The pampas is the name given to an extensive plain of Argentina. This wide stretch of country was once the bed of an ancient sea, covered with sand and salt. To this day large parts of it are nothing but desert, but on the grassy parts cattle have been pastured for many years. In the old days these cattle were looked after by a very lawless and daring band of men, called gauchos. Now the gauchos are disappearing, and railways and towns have been built on the pampas, and sheep-farming has been taken up. And that's about all I know, sir. What's the next conundrum?"

The Ed. frowned heavily and looked at another query. "Can you," he said,

"tell Steve Cox something about the names of Japanese War medals?"

"I can," said I promptly; "any chap—I mean, Jap, could do that. For gallant service in war the Japanese award the medal known as the Order of the Rising Sun. The office-boy told me the other day that his mother is going to give him one—the rising son, ha, ha, ha!" As the old Ed. maintained a stern expression I went on: "Military and naval officers in Japan can also win the Order of the Sacred Treasure. Another medal is the Order of the Golden Kite. This medal corresponds to our M.C. (Military Cross), or D.C.M. (Distinguished Conduct Medal)."

"And now," said the Ed., "Peter Hitchcock wants us to tell him what woods are used in the building of motor-boats?"

"All sorts, sir. For planking, teak is a splendid wood for boats that are to be employed in the tropics, but it is expensive. Mahogany, pitch-pine, and oak are also used, and for the keel; oak, pine, or American elm. The stem and stern-post are usually oak, or larch. Sometimes wood isn't used at all, steel, or a light alloy called duralumin being used."

"The next query," said the Ed., "is from Wilfred Rackham, of Reigate, who wants to know how many torpedoes a submarine carries."

"Nowadays, a submarine carries four tubes at the bow and two at the stern. Each tube has two torpedoes, one in the tube and the other stored in the torpedo-room. The torpedoes are discharged by air pressure, and the tubes have a water-tight cover at either end, one cover being opened and closed in the torpedo-room, the other being operated by gearing from the room."

"How is a submarine submerged?" asked the Ed.

"In order to submerge a submarine," I replied, without a moment's hesitation, "several tanks called 'main ballast tanks,' are completely flooded, and a few smaller tanks are partly flooded."

"What about air?"

"Compressed air is stored in reservoirs, or air bottles, at a pressure of 2,500 lb per square inch."

"What a brain!" The old Ed. stared at my cranium admiringly. "Can you tell Tom Grant how sugar is obtained from sugar-canes?"

"I can, sir—I mean, I can. The canes are rolled and squeezed in a cane-mill, which first cuts the canes into uniform length, then squeezes out the juice and carries the canes off to be burnt. The top roller of a cane mill often has a pressure of 500 tons. Of course, the sugar doesn't come out at the other end in nice white lumps—not by any means. There are a lot of things to be done before the thick dark juice from the cane becomes sugar as we know it."

"I suppose so. What's that noise, Whiskers?" said the Editor, cocking his ears.

"It's the office-boy, sir. He's making a sledge, sled, or sleigh, ready for the Christmas holidays."

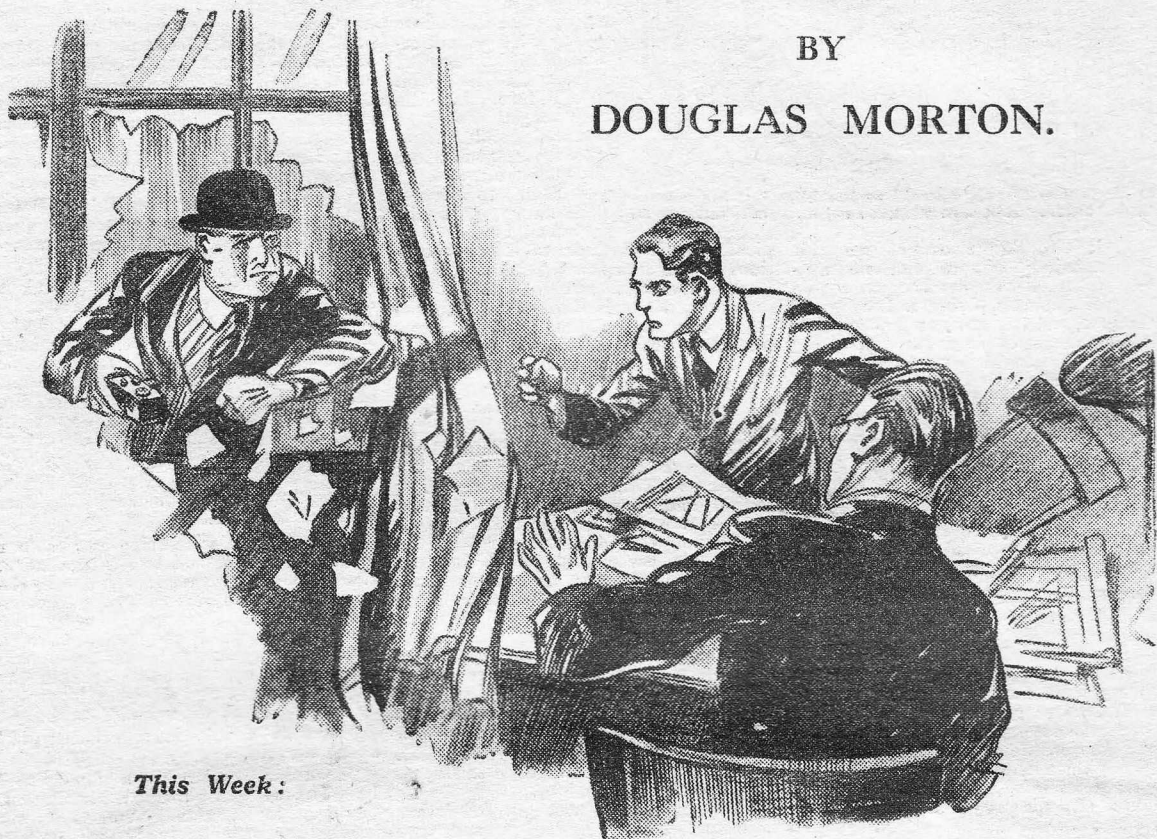
"Is he? Well, just pop round and tell him if he doesn't stop, I'll sleigh him, and he won't see Santa Claus, nor the wishbone of the turkey, nor the spotted socks his auntie's going to give him!"

"Very good, sir," said I, and away I whisked, whiskers and all.

Kings O' Speed!

BY

DOUGLAS MORTON.



This Week:

THE FLYING FISH!

CHAPTER 1. The Deadly Lock!

DANGER!

As though the actual words themselves had been lit up in living fire before his very eyes, Dick Stanford, his lighthearted whistle swept clean from his lips, halted dead in his tracks. Keyed to the utmost pitch, his tense nerves warned him that somewhere ahead lay terrible and sinister danger—danger both to himself and to the marvellous invention under his care.

Where did that peril lie? His hand had been uplifted to open the door of the little boathouse which housed the Flying Fish, that wonderful amphibian, which the super-brain of his employer, Cyrus J. Arkville, had created.

Combined car and boat were but simple words to describe the American millionaire's latest invention, in his secluded haunt, Benton Manor. The boathouse lay on the edge of a small lake in the grounds, and it was there that the secret trials took place.

Danger!

It would be worth thousands to anyone who could steal the Flying Fish, and, in his bones, Dick knew that the Wrecker, Arkville's implacable enemy, was once more on the trail.

Dick's hands held the key of the door of the boathouse, but he hesitated to put it in the lock. Holding his breath in suppressed excitement he listened with both ears. Suddenly a slight movement came whispering through the dim twilight. Slowly he turned his head in its direction.

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Through the chinks of the massive slats of the boathouse he detected a furtive stir. Someone was there! Dick waited with all the impatience of his seventeen years for his unwelcome visitor within to give him a clue. But nothing came. He must think it out for himself.

What was it? Where lay the peril? The door—the woodwork of the boathouse? No, by thunder! It was the lock. Some sixth sense seemed to warn him. In that simple contrivance lay his fate, for the Wrecker had sworn to get him sooner or later.

With a hardly perceptible movement the boy let his body sink down till he was flat on the ground. He raised his hand to the lock and gently inserted the key. Using a sharp stick, he slowly turned the key at full arm's stretch. Quietly the lock turned. It was nearly finished, when—

Crack, crack!

The roar of a heavy automatic rang out through the still evening air, and the vicious bullets tore over the boy as he hugged the very earth itself. Great Caesar! If he had been standing up his body would have been drilled, for that instrument of death had been connected to the fateful lock.

Silently he lay, to give the impression of having been hit—to lure on the man inside. But suddenly a faint spark, a slow trail of fire, came to his watching eyes. The black-guard was firing a train to the petrol dump in the boathouse. The Flying Fish, as she lay in the dock, would go up like a rocket.

Action! Now was the time. Rising from the earth like a released arrow, Dick crashed his body against the door. The latch gave on the instant, and the boy, gripping the jamb of the doorway, let himself drop like a stone.

AMAZING AMPHIBIAN AUTO!

The "Wrecker's" on the trail again—so is young Dick Stanford. And there's a number one size shock in store for the "Wrecker"!

Then he slid his feet forward, and his momentum shot his body over the concrete floor till he came to the trail of fire. He beat this out with wild hands, and then, in the dim light, shot into an old punt. He was over this in a flash, as a masked figure, with a guttural snarl, leapt to its feet.

The man was on him with a cat-like leap, and Dick went down with a sickening crash, as he took the full weight of that flying body. Over and over they rolled, now smashing into the skiffs that lay about, and now into the trestles that held the boats under repair; a veritable pair of fighting cats.

The man was as strong as a horse, and inch by inch Dick felt himself being dragged to the gates of the boathouse which led to the lake. The lake! At that point it dropped sheer away to a depth of thirty feet, where it had been specially dredged by Arkville's men.

Only a few feet separated them from the gates when Dick had a sudden desperate brainwave. If he could only get at the ropes which, high up, held the gates taut! Could he take the risk of letting one arm go from his man and release them? He knew that the villain was straining every nerve in his powerful body to get him to the gates and push him under to the dark, cold waters.

Stiffening himself as taut as a bow-string, Dick put all his weight into one terrific heave. His assailant shot backwards, and as he struck the gates with his heavy body, Dick leapt—leapt high in the air and caught the ropes above his head.

As he had hoped, his weight tore through the ropes as if they had been ribbons. Back flew the gates, and his attacker, his arms spread-eagled, shot out into the dark and evil-looking night.

There was a high-pitched snarl as the man disappeared, and Dick, with a resounding crash, smashed right down into the dock, striking his head on the edge. All went black before his eyes, but he grinned happily, though faintly, as he heard friendly voices calling and yelling to him in the night.

CHAPTER 2.

The Bogus Friend!

"**S**AY, sonny! You certainly raised a dent in that dock-side! How's the head now?"

It was Arkville speaking in his clipped manner, cigar between his teeth.

"I'm quite all right now, sir!" Dick replied. "But I expect that they'll be after us again, don't you, sir?"

"Sure thing! They mean to have the Flying Fish or do her in. Some pleasant job like that, I guess!"

Even as the American spoke there came a knock at the door of the library in which they were seated, and the figure of Hoult, Arkville's butler, entered the room. Dick glanced at him through lowered lids. He swore that one day he would unearth the secret of this thin, suave servant. He disliked him instinctively, and he knew that the feeling was returned.

"Mr. Slesser, sir!" he heard the butler announce.

"Come right in!" the millionaire said, as the visitor appeared in the doorway.

Dick stiffened in his chair. Who was this man, he thought, as Hoult left the room? The visitor was a smartly-dressed, plausible person, thick-set and powerful—but a regular City man.

He bowed as he heard Mr. Arkville introduce him. There was something about this man that Dick could not fathom. Despite his friendliness he felt that he was an enemy.

"I have called once more, Mr. Arkville, to trespass on your kindness," Mr. Slesser said in a hearty voice. "Your interest is in your fellow-countrymen who, shall we say, are not so well blessed with this world's goods as yourself."

But even as Arkville interrupted his visitor Dick knew that that was the millionaire's weak point—as witness the butler Hoult, an American like the inventor.

"Always willing to dig into the pants for a good cause," he heard his employer remark. "Smoke?"

The City man inclined his head and laughed as he took the proffered cigar and explained his mission, on which he enlarged at great length. Apparently it was some benefit performance, and Arkville agreed to take a good few tickets.

But Dick's mind was not on the subject under discussion. From where he sat he could see the man's hands, the only restless part of his smooth body. The fingers were twisting and turning around themselves, eager, in Dick's estimation, for some evil work.

And evil work it was, for Dick saw that he was pressing something under the edge of the table. The man's fingers worked rapidly, and the boy half-opened his mouth to yell a warning to Arkville when he checked himself.

"Let the blighter go on," he grinned to himself. "Don't forget the old motto—'let the other fellow do the work.'"

Soon, all smiles, the visitor was departing. Hardly had the door closed when Dick leapt to his employer's side.

"That man has left something behind him, sir," he said in a tense whisper.

In an instant Arkville was all attention, for Dick was no scaremonger.

"He's one of the gang, I'm sure, sir," the boy went on.

"What?" Arkville interrupted him. "That guy? Why, he's a man I met over in the States. Seems a good mixer! Sure you're right, sonny?"

Dick, in answer, pointed to the table-edge. Arkville cautiously put out his hand towards the small object that was lodged there.

"Don't touch it, sir!" Dick yelled. "It's neggolite!"

Neggolite! Arkville snapped back his hand like lightning. That was his own metal invention for instantaneous combustion—a metal which when once brought in contact with a wireless ray would burst into terrific and devastating flames—to lay waste anything near it.

"That great tough—" began Arkville.

"Great Scott, sir!" Dick suddenly exclaimed. "Your pocket wireless! It was on the table! He's got it!"

Even as he spoke there came a terrific crash as the glass in the big french windows smashed into a thousand fragments and the curtains were torn aside.

"Down, sir—down!" yelled the boy.

Out of the corner of his eye Dick had seen a figure outside the window—a figure pointing a small case at the very edge of the table. It was Slesser, and he held the pocket wireless in his hand, aiming it straight at the neggolite. The table, laden with its precious plans—plans of the Flying Fish—would in the next split second be a raging furnace.

Like a flash Dick flung himself at the heavy piece of furniture. Over it went, and as he fell to the floor he snatched up a heavy paper-weight. But before he could fling it the door of the library was thrown open. Framed in the doorway stood a masked figure, its face, as far as he could see, livid with rage.

"You blundering fool!" were the hissed words Dick and Arkville heard.

Then suddenly, like a hawk, the arm of the new visitor, his hand clenched round a missile, rose in the air, while out of the corner of his eye Dick saw Slesser shoot away into the night. But the missile was not directed at the City man, only the words. Instinctively Dick grabbed up the plans of the Flying Fish as the bomb left the miscreant's hand to land with a crash on the floor. Clouds of acrid smoke filled the library. Dick dashed at the door, but was met by a direct blow from a fist. There was a shout, a thud, and when the smoke had cleared Dick saw that he was alone. The great inventor had disappeared—a captive in the hands of that remorseless man, the Wrecker!

CHAPTER 3.

Leaping for Life!

THE very essence of speed and grace, the Flying Fish lay on the water gleaming in the moonlight. High and low Dick had sent out searchers under the command of the stocky Yorkshire foreman, Mold, to endeavour to find the missing millionaire. Even now, as he went over the massive engines of the amphibian for the last time, he awaited the final message from Mold.

He ran his eye over the gleaming monster as she lay on the still waters of the lake, her wonderful lines reflecting in the calm surface. Shaped like a shell, with lifting-planes forward like thin wafers of shining gold, she lay there, as a crouched lion, ready for all that was required of her.

For she was entered for the blue ribbon of the water world, the Henson Cup, and work must go on. That, Dick knew, would be Arkville's own order if he could be communicated with. The American's hopes were set on wresting the world-famous cup from its foreign holders and winning it for the country in which he now lived, and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of achieving that end.

The boy turned quickly as a figure raced to the little quay, which lay as bright as day under the sizzling arcs. It was Mold. Quickly Dick interrogated him.

"No, sir," was the disappointed reply he got. "No news at all."

"He can't be far away, Mold," said Dick, with boyish enthusiasm. "We'll soon find him. But for the present we must obey his orders. The Flying Fish must have her final trials to-night."

Without another word Mold leapt into the mechanic's seat and remained tense, ready for Dick's orders. The boy

gave one keen glance at him, for he knew that he was as anxious about the boss as he was himself, and then settled down to his job.

The enormous engines awoke to life under Dick's hand. He then pressed a small lever, and with a sound like the hiss of a snake the tiny compressed air-pumps came into action. They acted on the special forcing device which depressed the stern of the boat and allowed not a precious second to be lost in attaining a terrific speed.

Dick shot in his drive, and notched over the forcing device. Like a bullet from a gun, the propeller gripping the water with tremendous force, the Flying Fish, her stern already well down in the water, shot across the lake at a smashing speed.

Over came the wheel, and a mountain of water hung poised over them as they tore round in a gleaming arc, with the moonlight reflecting on the silver body, the razor-like prow a shining knife. Farther and farther Dick depressed the stern, notching over the regulator of the pumps inch by inch.

Higher and higher rose the wash behind them, and when Dick brought the lifting-planes into play it seemed as if the boat must sink right down into the trough she made for the propeller—sink right down never to rise again.

The lifting-fins crept back and back in little darts, forcing the nose more and more into the air.

"Faster and faster!" yelled Dick. "My hat!" he thought, this was speed.

He laid the ship over in a glorious curve, and the tremendous wash rushed up the sides of the lake, and the very vaults of the sky echoed the enormous roar of those terrific engines. On—on!

"Good heavens, sir!"

It was Mold, shrieking at the top of his voice and pointing excitedly at the trees edging the lake. Dick followed the direction of the outstretched hand and beheld a sight that opened his eyes very wide. For over the tree-tops, wasp-like and tiny in the brilliant moonlight, shot a little monoplane.

It was the Wrecker on the trail once more!

Straight at the Flying Fish the monoplane dived. Quick as a flash Dick flung himself on to the wheel and brought the boat round in a breathless curve. The foam of the water splayed over the gunwale as he rammed the rudder over more and more.

Crack! Crack!

Bullets harmlessly split the wash as they came out of their terrific turn. From the lake side, where the great arcs sizzled and spat, came the answering fire, as Dick's fellow-employees let drive at the plane.

"Great Scott!" Dick yelled.

Quickly he seized a Very pistol, for he had seen a sight in the machine above that had nearly frozen his heart. High up into the air sped the warning rocket from the boy's hand. The splutter of the fire from the bank died away, and Mold now saw what Dick's keen young eyes had first spotted.

In the plane above, hanging helplessly over the edge, was their boss! The Wrecker must have brought him to witness the destruction of the Flying Fish!

Dick set his teeth. He must get into that plane somehow. He tore round the edge of the lake, as the monoplane banked over to dive at them once more. Quickly he handed the wheel over to Mold, showed him the course he wanted him to follow, and shouted his instructions into the man's ear.

As he did so he saw that Arkville was now sitting up behind the pilot. Dick gave a great shout as he noticed that the American, now in the full glare of the searchlight from the shore, had managed to wrench one arm free from his bonds.

The boy, snatching up an open knife from a locker near to him, jumped on to the bow of the Flying Fish, and stood tense and taut over the hissing waters as they shot away from the cutting prow as if ruled by a giant's mechanical hand. At his feet lay a rope ladder, with gripping hooks at the end.

All depended now on Dick! With one eye on the plane he wrenched open a small concealed recess in the covered prow of the boat. Like a jack-in-the-box up shot a little case—another marvellous child of Arkville's magnetic brain. The contact-breaker!

"I must put the wind up that pilot, if only for a minute," grinned Dick to himself.

With a quick movement he flung out one hand. Mold obeyed on the instant, and the boy hung on desperately with all his strength as the powerful boat beneath him swept round in its tracks till it was racing parallel with the hawk-like enemy above them, and tearing along at the same speed.

"Keep it there!" shouted Dick, with boyish determination. Mold's grim face showed that he had sensed the words, though he could not hear them, and he hung over the wheel as if his very life depended on it.

In the low-flying plane above it was evident that the pilot was uneasy, for he leant over the side and viewed the racing boat beneath him.

Crack! Crack!

Once more the bullets tore around Dick's head. But he was ready. All in one breathless movement he gathered the rope ladder into his hand and switched on the contact-breaker. He swung round the dial of that marvellous invention till it pointed directly at the engine of the monoplane. To his great joy he saw that the engine had "cut-out." It was enough.

With one tremendous heave he flung the hooks of the rope ladder straight for the combing of the cockpit above him. He shouted with joy as he saw that his luck was in, for the hooks gripped like tentacles. He shot another signal to the waiting Mold, and he saw his fingers notch over the forcing device and raise the fins till the prow of the Flying Fish stood up to its farthest extent.

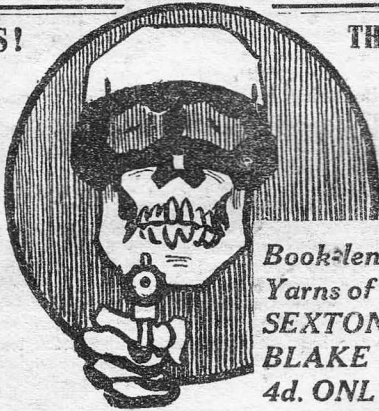
Dick gathered himself together into a bunch and leapt. Swaying and clutching at the ladder he handed up his knife to the waiting millionaire; saw the bonds rapidly cut, and knew, in the next moment of time, that his employer was spinning headlong with himself down into the homely waters of the lake.

CHAPTER 4.

Mystic Symbols!

AT the wheel of Arkville's latest sports model, purchased only the day before, Dick pushed along the Bath Road at a good clip. The Delaunay-Belleville was a topping car, the road was fairly clear, and, above all, the inventor was sitting by the boy's side relating

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his adventures. So Dick considered that the world was good.

They were soon threading the traffic of the Great West Road, and Dick, cutting through Shepherd's Bush and Hyde Park, quickly brought the Delaunay-Belleville to a standstill in Piccadilly, at the door of the office at which his employer wished to call.

Suddenly he addressed the inventor.

"While you are in there, sir, I'd like to pay a call on our friend Slessor. Is that all right?"

Arkville glanced keenly at the boy's face.

"What's under your hat, sonny?" he smilingly queried.

Dick grinned in reply.

"Only just an idea, sir!" he said

"O.K.!" said his chief, after a moment's hesitation. "But I guess you'll have to be pretty fly to get anything on that slick guy. Mind you don't lose your watch!" he added, with a short laugh.

With that, the inventor disappeared up the steps into the office, and Dick wended his way to the City.

Strange to say, he met with no opposition when he sent in his name in the waiting-room of the big block of offices which evidently claimed Mr. Slessor as its owner; and he was greeted with bland politeness by the City man as he entered his private sanctum. Dick had to admit that he certainly was a "slick guy."

"It's going to be difficult to get anything out of this blighter, I can see," murmured the boy to himself. "But there may be a clue I can pick up as to what the gang is going to do."

Aloud he said:

"You never expected to see me again, did you, Mr. Slessor?"

"The unexpected always happens in life," was the calm reply he got. "My last visit to Mr. Arkville ended, perhaps, shall we say, a little abruptly. Doubtless you are still seeking the identity of the Wrecker. You have but little hope of tracing that mysterious individual, or staying his actions."

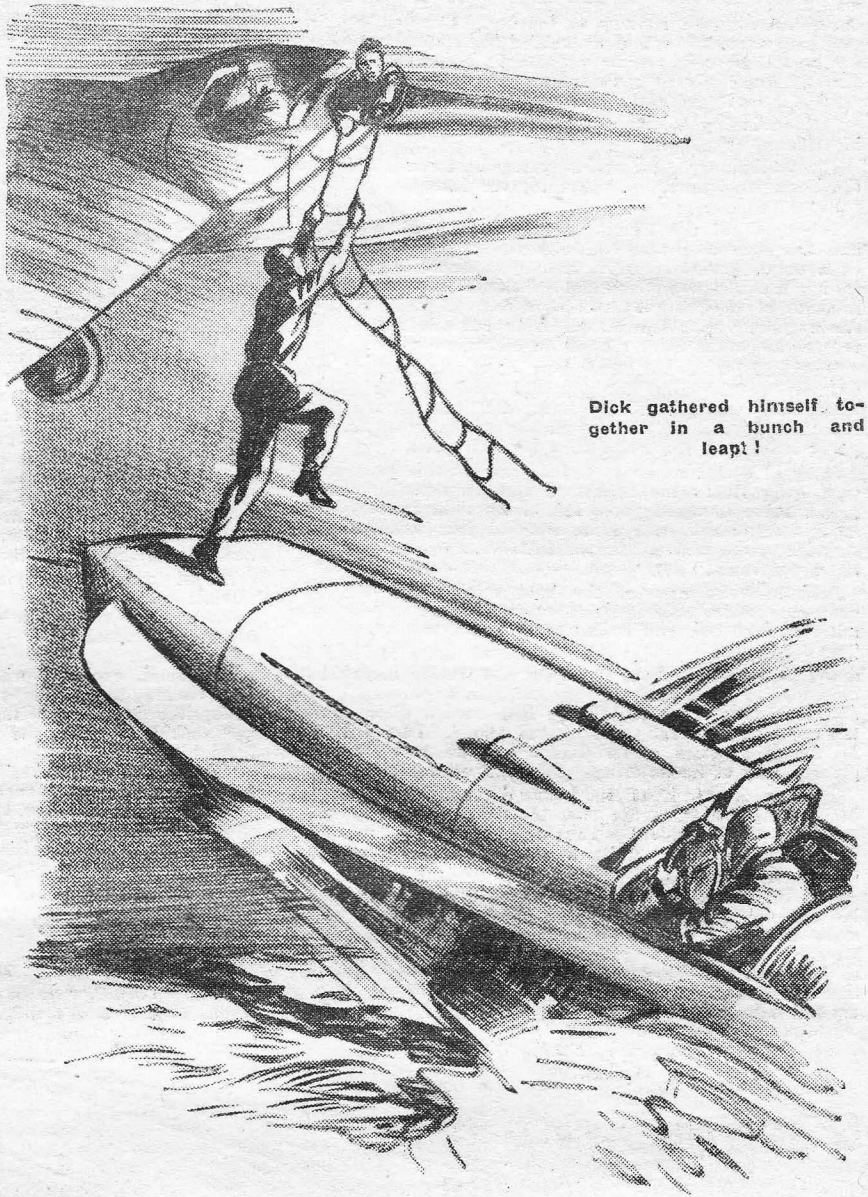
"You may be the man yourself," said Dick. "At any rate, whoever you are, you are a cool customer. I admire your cheek. Really I do."

As he continued his intentional flattery the boy's keen eyes watched Slessor's restless hands. Still talking, he saw that the man was furtively drawing his blotting-pad over a sheet of paper. What was on that paper? Dick cudgelled his brains for a plan to secure it. There must be some way.

At that moment the telephone-bell rang. Automatically Dick put out his hand to the instrument at the same time as Slessor did. In a flash his plan of action came to him. He could not hope to overcome this huge fellow in a rough-and-tumble. All he required was a few seconds respite, and the telephone was his method.

His hand reached the instrument first. Gripping the receiver, he cupped it in his hand, and with one lightning motion of his strong, supple wrist, shot it upward at Slessor's face. It struck the man straight and true on the nose as he leant forward over the desk, and the pain in the sensitive organ made Slessor fling up his hands to his face.

Like a flash, Dick's hand shot out and gripped the paper by the blotting-pad. But the villain's hand was



Dick gathered himself together in a bunch and leapt!

nearly as quick, and the sheet tore in half as Dick leapt for the door.

The clerks in the outer office opened their eyes wide as they saw their usually calm chief tearing after Dick's lithe form. But youth told, and the boy's fleet feet soon landed him in the safety of the street.

That evening, as the Flying Fish, her wheels now let down from their protective coverings and her fins hidden in her body, tore round the mile-long oval racing track in Benton Park, undergoing her final trials, Dick turned over and over in his mind the mystic symbols contained in that half-sheet of paper.

...rk Z-2nd."

What ever did they mean?

CHAPTER 5.

Menace from the Sea!

ARKVILLE and Dick stood by the windows of the hotel lounge and gazed across the promenade of the famous South Coast resort. Crowds of holiday-makers of all shapes and sizes crowded the foreshore for hundreds of yards in either direction, for this was the day of the Henson Cup!

With her long, tapering, silver body shining like a mirror in the brilliant sunlight, the Flying Fish was

majestically making her way, with Mold at her wheel, down the concrete runway to the sea. Cries of admiration rang from the crowd as, taking the water, her wheels slowly withdrew into their water-tight compartments, and she slid gracefully to a vacant mooring-buoy.

"Guess we'll get right aboard, sonny!" said Arkville.

Dick, grinning at the astonished official's face, leapt to his side.

The preliminary examination was quite formal, and soon the boats were lined up, eager for the race.

Boom!

The crash of the starting-gun rang across the waters, and the cliffs awoke to life with the echoes of the roars of a dozen engines. As if a magnet had been attached to her bows, the Flying Fish, with Dick at her wheel, immediately took the lead. Like a shaft of light, with the sun reflecting in all directions from her silver body, she tore through the calm sea at an enormous speed.

Dick had forced her stern down at the very outset, and soon he was bringing her gold fins into play. Back and back they came, inch by inch, and the Flying Fish, crouched down into the trough she made, with her propeller tearing at the water in a fury of speed.

Intrepid driver as he was, the pace on this calm ocean took even Dick's breath away, and by now they easily had a three hundred yards lead from their nearest rival. It was wonderful, and Dick shouted for joy, and even Arkville, stern and set in the little seat by his side, felt the great thrill.

Dick laid the nose of the boat straight for the first buoy—ten miles ahead. The course was triangular, ten miles to each leg, and it had to be completed twice.

The first leg passed before either of them realised it, and Dick eased the boat down for the terrific bank which they had to take. Round they came in a glorious curve, and then once more the Flying Fish settled down to her work. Soon the next point loomed ahead. Dick took the mark-boat as close as he dared. As he rounded it he glanced idly at its lettering. "Z." That was right.

Then a great light suddenly dawned on him. Z! Mark Z! That was the clue to the mystic note. And "2nd"? By thunder! That meant the second round. The Wrecker would make a crashing attempt on them on the next round!

Speed! Speed! That was what he must have now. No use holding up any reserve power. By the time he sighted mark Z again he must have a clear lead over anyone else, in order to have the time to deal with anything which the Wrecker might spring on them. He was sure he was right in his surmise, for the mark-boat Z lay ten miles out at sea, dead from the shore.

He was determined to win the Henson Cup for Britain, and he notched over the regulator of the forcing device to the fullest extent and brought the fins back and back till they were absolutely at the safety limit. On and on sped the faithful boat at a speed which nearly turned them dizzy.

Now!

With a long lead over his nearest rival, Dick neared the fateful mark Z on the second round.

Great Scott! What was that? He could hardly believe his eyes! For out of the sea, near to the turning-point, a tiny submarine was breaking the surface. Dick saw the conning-tower open and a masked figure jump out—a bomb in its hand.

That bomb must never be thrown! Dick, setting his teeth, acted on the instant. Straight at the submarine he charged, with all the power of the massive engines of the Flying Fish roaring its challenge.

To the man by the conning-tower the speedboat must have seemed like an avenging monster. He crouched down in terror as the razor-like prow hung over him for one awful second—like the knife of a guillotine.

But Dick judged things to a nicety. Over went his wheel, and with but a coat of paint between him and the enemy ship he crashed along by her side. Behind him the inexorable wash zoomed up in a deadly volume of water. It hit the submarine amidships with a terrible crash. Up and up it rose, till it came down like a giant's hand on to the villain by the conning-tower.

Round came the Flying Fish—once more came the terrible crash of water. The bewildered man let go his hold, and was swept like a matchstick into the maelstrom of surging waters.

Crash!

The bomb exploded with a terrific roar. Away went the conning-tower in a flash. Figures, carrying a collapsible boat, surged through the gap in the submarine and took to the sea, the vessel itself rolling and dipping helplessly.

"Me and the Wrecker'll get you yet!" came Slessor's faint voice to Dick's ears.

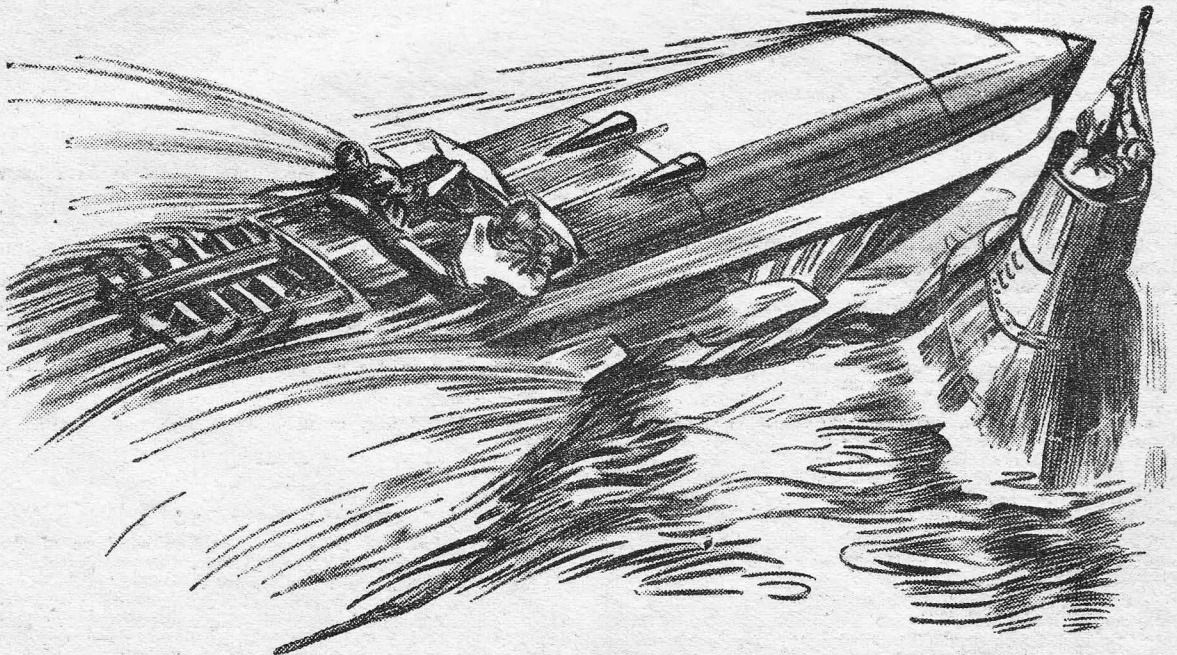
"He ain't the Wrecker, but why worry?" came the clipped words from Arkville. "He'll need some dry pants when he gets home. Let her have her head, sonny!"

Setting the Flying Fish once more smashing on her way for home—for home and victory—Dick grinned up at his employer.

"Sure thing, boss!" he shouted joyously. "What you say goes!"

THE END.

(There's another great yarn in this ripping series next week, boys! Don't miss it! It's better than ever.)

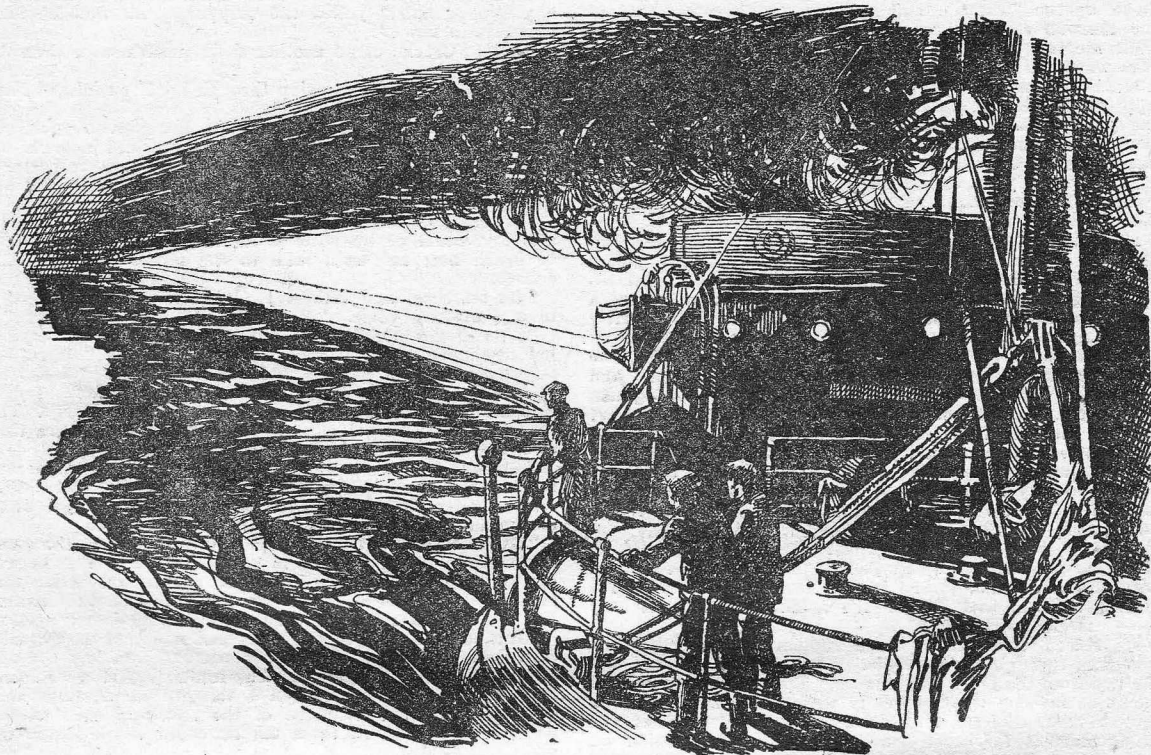


Dick spun the wheel, and with but a coat of paint between him and the enemy submarine, he crashed alongside her!

The FIGHTING MIDDY!

(For opening chapters, see page 26.)

By DAVID GOODWIN.



The Avenger!

NED, half suffocated by the gag, his wrists swelling where the spun yarn bound them tightly, had never been quite so unhappy in his life as during the next twenty minutes. He managed to spit out the ball of yarn at last, and fell into a violent fit of coughing.

"This is a ghastly business!" he muttered. "The pinnace is gone, and for all I know her crew are at the bottom. Who are these ruffians? And how dare they cut down a Navy launch in the open Solent! They must be a pretty desperate crew, and they won't stick at much."

The midddy tried to collect his thoughts.

"It sounds as if they meant to make short work of me.

What are they so scared of? Their necks, I should think. They're Russians, some of them, and the rest are ruffians in Russia's pay. And all of them spies!"

He tried to loosen the bonds round his wrists by working them, but the deck-hands had tied the knots too well.

"That brute Dimitri must be a regular chief of spies for them to take so much trouble over rescuing him. They must have got word to him somehow, and lain in wait with this yacht, and taken all those risks just on his account. He stood a good chance of getting drowned as well; though, of course, he was prepared and we weren't." Ned thought for a moment. "Or is it that they don't trust him, and are afraid of him giving away the whole lot of them if he gets put on trial or court-martial?"

"Wish I knew," added Ned; "not that it matters much to me, I suppose. This looks like being my finish. They'd never let me get away after being in the thick of it like this."

He looked round him with eyes that gradually grew accustomed to the gloom. There was a certain amount of light in the compartment, filtering in through the badly joined after-bulkhead where it met the side of the vessel. This light apparently came from the engine-room below. Ned shuffled across and put his eye to both chinks; but the

light filtered in through an angle, and he could see nothing.

The place was a sail-room, devoted to the small trysails and jibs which the yacht carried but hardly ever set. She was evidently a fast vessel. There was a porthole at the side, the scuttle of which was open, and Ned could see the starry sky and dark water through it. A strong, cool draught played down on him from overhead, and, looking up, he saw that a hooded ventilator opened through the deck within easy reach of an upright man's raised hands.

"There's a dog's chance yet!" thought Ned. "If only my arms were free, I believe I could easily shove the cowl of that ventilator clean off, and scramble up through the hole. It's a thundering wide cowl. Still, it wouldn't do me

any good. I'd only come through on to the deck among those ruffians, and they'd just knock me on the head for my pains. Who's that talking?"

To his surprise, Ned found he could hear perfectly well all that was said on deck. The ventilator opened near the foot of the low bridge, with which its hood was almost level, and the words of the

skipper and Dimitri, who were evidently standing by the bridge wheel, came down it like a speaking-tube.

"There'll be no safety for us anywhere in the Channel," said Dimitri's voice, "if one of those flatfeet off the pinnace gets ashore or aboard a vessel and gives warning of us."

"It's ten to one against any of 'em getting out of it, or seeing the light again. We went clean over them," said the skipper.

"We ought to clear the French coast by daylight, and we shan't be safe till we've made Rotterdam, all the same. I wonder you didn't turn her round after the smash and run out of the Solent by the way you came, instead of goin' right through, and out at the westerly end."

"You always want to teach everyone their business. Johnny!" snapped the skipper. "Leave it to me. There's no warships this end, and we shall double round the island, and away eastwards again."

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IN THE GRIP OF THE SPIES!

Ned Hardy held prisoner on foreign yacht.

"I wish ~~we'd~~ got that cursed fellow Ralph Hardy aboard here, as well as the kid!" growled Dimitri. "I'd like to put his light out. All my troubles for the last year I owe to him, and he's done the Firm a lot of harm. He'll do more yet if he's not stopped."

"He'll take more stoppin' than any o' you think of," said the skipper. "Firm or no Firm!"

Ned, who heard every word, wondered what they could mean by the "Firm." Did it mean the Secret Service of the Russian spies? Their headquarters, or, at any rate, their meeting-place, was not Moscow, but Rotterdam—that port where all nations meet—it was nearer to England.

He heard the skipper say with satisfaction that Hurst Spit was nearly abreast of them, which told Ned where the yacht was. She was running out of the west end of the Solent, and would shortly turn past the Needles and into the open Channel.

"What'll they do to me when they get there?" thought Ned. "If only I could get my arms free it'd be something. What's this in the wall? I'll have a try at it."

He felt a rusty, ragged nut sticking out from the bulk-head against which he was leaning. It gave him a gleam of hope, and he began to fray the yarn that bound his wrists against it. A small strand of spun-yarn will bind a man fast, being far too tough to break; but it is easily frayed against anything sharp, as it is of loose texture.

Even if he freed his hands it would be of little use, the middy thought; but it gave him something to do, and made him feel less helpless. He raged inwardly against his captors, and felt that if he could only leave the mark of his fists on one of the cowards before they settled him, it would be something. Ned plied his bonds viciously against the steel nut, and had the satisfaction of feeling the spun-yarn give way slowly. He went at it so vigorously that he rasped the skin from his hands and wrists several times, but scarcely felt the pain.

"Free!" he gasped, as the last strands parted, and he stretched out his hands joyously. "By Jove! I wish I was, though! I'm locked in this beast of a trap! No getting through that scuttle—it's much too small. If only I—Hallo!"

He stared and blinked as a sudden light flooded the sail-room through the porthole. At first he thought it was the ray from the Hurst Lighthouse. Then he almost shouted aloud as he saw what it really was—the searchlight of a torpedo-boat, directed straight at the yacht. And at the same moment he heard startled cries and confusion on deck, and the clanging of the engine-room telegraph.

"She's after us!" cried the skipper's rasping voice, in tones almost of panic. "Give her every ounce of steam! Below there! Full speed!"

"I knew those fellers out of the pinnace would get out of it and give the alarm!" cried Dimitri furiously. "You can't drown these Navy chaps. We ought to have hove-to and clubbed them all. That's a twenty-seven knot boat from the flotilla, and she's bound to catch us. See, she's signalling to heave-to!"

Ned darted to the porthole with a half-uttered cheer, his heart beating fast. Could it be true?

The yacht had swerved, and the light could no longer be seen in a direct line. Then it came in sight again—a dazzling white spot fully two miles away, from which sprouted a long truncheon of light, which spread out in a circle over the black yacht and lit her up like noonday. The circle left her, played here and there over the sea on all sides of her for a few seconds, and then settled on her steadily, and so remained.

"She's from the fleet! She's after us! By George, she'll catch us in twenty minutes!" cried Ned, quivering with excitement. "Now, you beggars on deck there, you'll get it in the neck!"

It was impossible to see anything of the vessel behind that bright, white spot; but the lowness of the light above the water showed she must be a torpedo-boat—probably of the second class, for the smallest did not carry searchlights—and she was evidently coming along fast. Then the light waned to a much fainter glow, and smaller flashes showed above it. The pursuer was signalling the yacht to heave to, and to fail at her peril.

Not the least notice did the yacht take—she was plainly intending to run for it at any cost. Her crew knew what they had to expect if they were captured. The yacht turned sharply, trying to dodge the light under the

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side of the island, but it followed her remorselessly. The muffled shouts on deck grew more confused. The torpedo-boat was coming up hand-over-fist.

Flash! Boom! A six-pounder spoke from the torpedo-boat and a blind shell dashed into the water well to the right of her. It was the pursuer's warning of what was to follow if the yacht refused to obey the signals.

"Keep her goin'! I'll brain the man that touches the engine-telegraph!" yelled the skipper. "As well be sunk as heave-to now!"

Flash! Crack! came another shell, much nearer than the last.

"I wish they'd put one slap through her!" exclaimed Ned. "I'd take my chance!"

The torpedo-boat did not fire again, however. Apparently she did not want to sink the quarry; and though the powerfully-engined yacht was doing the very respectable speed of twenty-one knots, the little greyhound behind her was going five knots faster and overhauling her rapidly.

"It's no good steerin' seaward!" cried the skipper desperately. "She'll be up with us in three minutes. I'll have to beach her, an' we'll take to the shore. It's our only chance."

"Go on, then, and make it! Quick, man!" cried Dimitri in a quavering voice. "We've had blundering enough."

"You've got nothin' to make a song about! You've a better chance of getting clear than any of us!" cried the skipper furiously, altering the vessel's course. "Stand by all, an' jump for it as soon as we're hard an' fast! I'll ram her on to the mud behind the Christchurch Ledge. The torpedo-boat can't get close in to us there—we'll have time to make a bolt inland—bar coastguards."

Instantly Ned understood the skipper's plan. As escape seaward was impossible he meant to run the yacht ashore and abandon her, her crew trusting to luck to get away before any pursuit could follow them on the land.

"Great Jupiter! Dimitri'll get away if he gets the ghost of a start!" thought Ned, in consternation. "The beggar can disguise himself like a blessed chameleon. Give him half a chance and they'll never lay hands on him again! I'm responsible, and I've lost the pinnace already!"

All thought of danger was gone, and now that the torpedo-boat was so close up Ned's one concern was lest the spy should get away altogether. The middy looked round him in a fever of anxiety. Then a thought struck him, and, quickly piling two or three of the rolled-up sails on the floor, he mounted on them till he could reach inside the ventilator funnel.

The ventilator's cowl, or hood, was bolted down on the inside with two bolts. Ned shot them back instantly. If he could shift the whole cowl off its bearing he would be able to get through on to the deck. What he expected to do there he hardly knew, but he was ready to trust to luck.

He made an effort to move the cowl, but failed. His footing was too insecure. Then came a sudden lurch, a violent swing of the whole vessel, and Ned was nearly thrown head over heels back on to the floor.

The yacht had run aground without any jar or violence upon soft mud, but the sudden stoppage at full speed sent most of her crew sprawling, and the ventilator cowl, being loose, toppled right off its bearings and crashed into the scuppers. Ned was left with his head and shoulders sticking out of the space it left, and, with a heave and a bound, he hoisted himself through and his feet reached the deck.

The yacht was hard and fast on a mudbank that ran far out from the land, with shallow water all round her. The torpedo-boat, unable to come any closer without sticking fast also, had hove-to nearly three hundred yards away, and was hastily lowering a boat, her searchlight still blazing full upon the yacht. The crew of the yacht were already vaulting over her rail into the shoal water.

"Look out! There's the kid cutting loose!" cried the skipper hoarsely, as Ned snatched a heavy belaying-pin out of the rack next the mast and flew like a tiger-cat at Dimitri, who was just making for the side. "Duck, you fool!"

Dimitri threw himself flat as the skipper, who was twenty feet away, whipped out a revolver and snapped a swift and deadly accurate shot at the middy as he dashed across the deck. The yacht's captain was an artist with the revolver, and had Ned remained upright there would be nothing more to record but his funeral. Luckily, he caught his foot on a ring-bolt, and went sprawling at the very moment the skipper fired, and the bullet went

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

MIDSHIPMAN NED HARDY, son of a line of sea captains, is appointed to the *Victorious*, the same ship from which his brother Ralph has been cashiered in connection with a robbery. His fortune soon befalls the new swotty, for he is made the scapegoat of a plot to wreck the British Navy. Thanks to a warning note from Ralph, Ned succeeds in establishing his innocence. Shortly after this the young middy is put in charge of the first pinnace and ordered to proceed to Portsmouth to collect Dimitri, the spy who had so nearly ruined him. On the return journey, however, the pinnace is run down by an enemy craft manned by Dimitri's friends, and Ned is hauled aboard and imprisoned in the sail-room.

(Now Read On.)

"He's down! Bolt for it—don't wait!" yelled the skipper; for Ned lay motionless where he had fallen, and both the ruffians supposed he was shot. "Straight along the mud-bank, and make the beach as quickly as you can!"

With an oath directed at Ned the spy leaped the rail at the same time as his comrade. They plunged away with all their might through the shallow water to the long, grey ridge of mudbank and ran to the shore, along which the rest of the crew—six, all told—were already hurrying at their utmost speed.

Ned had struck his head against a stanchion pretty sharply in falling, and he lay for several moments in a dazed condition. He pulled himself together and struggled to his feet.

The foremost of the fugitives from the yacht had already nearly traversed the long spit of mud; the two leaders gained the hard beach and dashed inland through a gap in the cliffs as Ned picked himself up.

Dimitri, however, was still no great distance from the yacht, the last of them all. Her late skipper was some thirty yards ahead of him, and Dimitri, who was rapidly being left behind, shouted so vigorously at the yacht's captain that the latter turned back.

"Why don't you hurry, you fool? Don't you see the torpedo men are on to us?" shouted the skipper; for the torpedo-boat's dinghy, with six men in her, armed with rifles, was pulling for the mud-spit as hard as they could go!

"I can't, I tell you!" yelled Dimitri frantically, labouring along slowly through the thick mud nearer the water's edge. He was beside himself with rage and fright, and, having chosen the worst part of the mud, besides being heavier than any of the others, he sank over his knees, and could hardly get along. "Don't you see I'm stuck! Help me out!"

"Not me! It's everyone for himself now!" gasped the skipper, turning towards the shore.

"You dog!" roared the spy. "If you leave me to fall into their hands, as sure as there's a sky above us, I'll put them on to you and all the others! I'll give away every man in the game, from the highest to the lowest! You know me! I'll wreck the whole show!"

The skipper turned to him with a face as furious as his own. Dimitri's threat moved him even more than the impending danger.

"You treacherous cur!" he cried. "You daren't split on us all!"

"I'll sell all I know for the price of my neck, if they catch me again, I swear it!" gasped Dimitri, struggling and sinking deeper.

One swift glance the skipper took seaward, and one at Dimitri. His mouth set, grim and cruel. He saw there was not a chance in a thousand of pulling the unwieldy Dimitri out of the quicksand and getting him ashore before the bluejackets came up. The skipper whipped his revolver from his hip-pocket.

"I believe you, you cur!" he snarled. "And I've got my orders, and here's where I carry 'em out. If there was a chance o' you gettin' left and betrayin' us, I was to stop your mouth an' make you safe! Take it, then, for you've earned it!"

He raised his revolver and fired point-blank at Dimitri. A broken cry came from the spy's lips, and he collapsed upon the mud. The skipper, putting up his smoking pistol, turned to run along the harder ground for the shore.

Ned, on the yacht's deck, gave a cry of horror. Base though the spy was, the skipper's action seemed a murder so cowardly that the middy's sympathy went out to the fallen man.

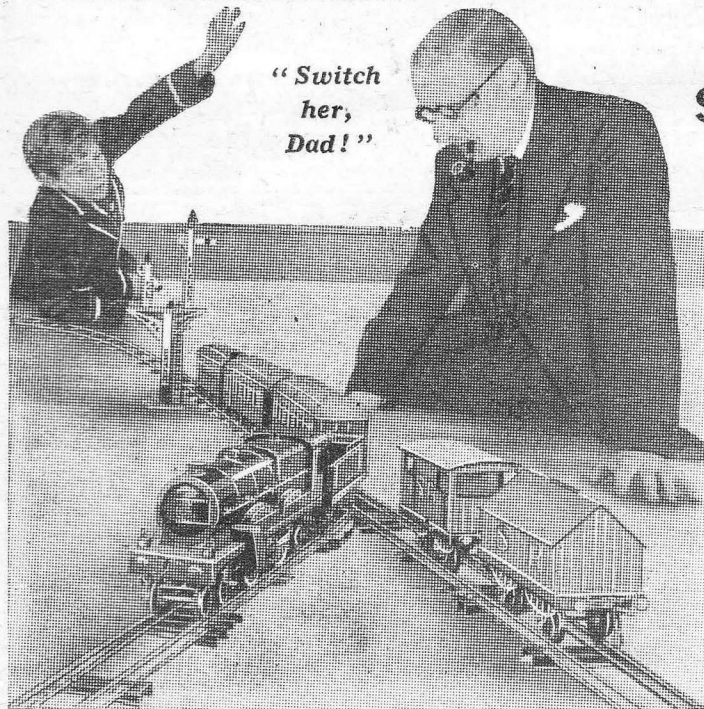
"You coward, to shoot a chap who's helpless!" he shouted, hardly knowing what he said, and he shook his fist wildly at the flying skipper. "My stars, what wild beasts they are, all of them! Where's the destroyer's boat? Ah!"

The last cry was wrung from him at the sight of a vengeance so swift and unexpected that it took him by surprise. The torpedo-boat's dinghy was coming up fast, though still two hundred yards or so away. The searchlight shone full as noonday upon the long spit of mud, lighting up the whole grim scene.

The yacht's skipper, having fired the fatal shot, was making his escape with all speed, when the crack of a rifle rang out from the dinghy, and the man threw up his hands, and, falling forward on his face, lay still.

"Great guns, they've got him!" exclaimed Ned, as he realised that swift justice had overtaken the murderer. Rather than let him escape, the order had been given to fire, and one of the bluejackets had brought the man down.

(Well, chums, Ned's had a narrow escape, hasn't he? But he's not out of the wood yet, by any means! Don't miss next week's instalment of this great yarn of the Royal Navy.)



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THE VALLEY OF SLAVES!

(Continued from page 18.)

Before Sir Napier could reply, a sudden sharp report rang out in the gorge.

One of the Aggolas, recovering his nerve, had snatched up one of the rifles that had been dropped by his companions. Raising it to his ebony shoulder, he fired wildly towards the dimly seen faces of those looking down through the open trap.

It was a bad shot. In his excitement the man had failed to take anything like a correct aim.

Instead of flying to its mark, the bullet passed beneath the airship—and on its way it struck the thin rope that held Da Rosa swaying perilously forty yards or so in mid-air. The strands parted, and there was an echoing shriek from the Portuguese as he dropped like a stone.

There was a ghastly thud. "My heavens!" panted Figgins hoarsely. Da Rosa lay where he had fallen, a huddled shape. He did not move—would never move again. Death had come to the evil master of the valley of slaves at the hands of one of his own followers!

At the sight of their master's terrible fate the Aggolas' superstitious terror of the great airship gripped them in full force. With wild cries they turned in a body and swarmed out through the mouth of the gorge, vanishing among the trees beyond.

Chortz and the other three Portuguese, seeing themselves deserted and at the mercy of the freed slaves, once the Dakkans had gathered their wits together, turned and bolted hastily after the retreating Aggolas.

A long rope-ladder came dropping to earth from the hovering dirigible. A few minutes later Sir Napier Wynter and Mr. Railton, Commander Dawson and Eric Kildare, had climbed swiftly to earth.

They were followed by other Sixth-Formers, and by Tom

Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and a swarm of other excited fellows. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were surrounded by a cheering crowd, and George Francis Kerr was the first to grasp his chums' hands.

The Dakkans looked dazed with the sudden, startling turn of events. Then suddenly they seemed to realise that they were free.

They dropped to their knees in a vast circle around the airship party, almost moaning with gratitude.

Sir Napier Wynter, who had turned to the huddled form of Da Rosa and made a hasty examination, rose, with a grim face.

"His neck was broken in the fall," he said quietly. "That is the end of one of the biggest scoundrels it has ever been my lot to meet!"

There was a tremendous celebration on board the S 1000 that evening as the giant airship cruised on towards the coast high above the tangled jungle. The rescue of Figgins and Fatty Wynn from the Valley of Thunder, and the end of the evil practices that had gone on there so long, certainly called for a celebration, the St. Jim's juniors considered.

But, despite the fact that a ripping feed was held, Fatty Wynn, for once, was one of the most modest caterers present! He had not forgotten the results of his last oversize supper—would never forget them as long as he lived! And he did not intend to risk anything of that sort happening again as long as he was on board the S 1000.

A few days later the giant airship was leaving Africa altogether. At the coast Sir Napier had informed the authorities of what they had discovered, and Government representatives were already on their way into the interior to take possession of Da Rosa's secret diamond workings—which in future would be worked by paid labour, to the benefit of the black tribes in the neighbourhood.

And the S 1000, with droning engines, sped onwards out over the shimmering Atlantic, on the first 'Africa-Canada flight ever made'. For the American continent was the next stop; in a few days the Flying School would be visiting the Wild West!

THE END.

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