

THE MESSENGERS

BY CLIVE FENN

IT was a bleak and blinding day of snow, and the two horsemen from Revik City had their work cut out to get on through a desolate country in which there were no tracks now, while they were followed, as they knew well, by the emissaries of the guerilla chief, Stanislas. Revik had not yet settled down as the new capital of the new State of Rothnia. It wanted help, and Ivan and Stepan had been deputed to carry the despatch to chief headquarters, asking for aid. But the mischief was that Stanislas and his roving bands of freebooters were infesting all the land. Stanislas did not wish for order and peace. Such things would stop his filibustering for ever and a day.

"Not a sign of the rebels!" grunted Ivan in his moustache as he walked his horse down into a valley. "I reckon our commander was worrying himself without a cause. I would for my part like a meeting with some of the scum. Warm one. Faugh, it is cold!"

Stepan nodded. He was an old campaigner.

"Ah!" he growled.

He was thinking of the plight of the folks in Revik, their supplies cut off by the insurgents, no corn, no mutton, nothing. The last supply convoy was diverted to the camp of Stanislas, who, with his followers, was in clover.

"Hear anything?" asked Ivan, after they had been riding on for another hour.

"No," said his comrade, getting chatty again.

"There it is again!" cried Ivan, turning in his saddle.

From far away came once more the low muttering sound which had caused Ivan to speak.

Wolves!

The horses threw up their heads and showed

signs of alarm. The headquarters, where the message meant deliverance for Revik and its famished people, was still many miles distant to the west.

Behind, the alarm note was plainer than before.

"Your beast is fresher than mine," said Ivan as he felt for his wallet. "If it comes to it, you shall ride on. I will settle with those brutes."

"I shall not leave you," replied the other.

As he spoke he hazarded a glance over his shoulder. They had passed out of the valley on to the plains, and the white expanse, touched as with a brush with the shadow of night, was dotted with grey forms.

Ivan sprang from his saddle as his mount stumbled and fell to its knees, for a wolf had charged and fixed its fangs in the horse's leg. Stepan was at his comrade's side, and their revolvers for a time checked the hideous onslaught, but the grey tide swept forward irresistibly. The sword of Ivan flashed in the air. His companion's revolver cracked for the last time, sending another savage ranger of the wilderness to earth, and it was then a diversion occurred. One of the pack threw up its head and howled, and there floated across the landscape the faintest cloud of smoke.

The two men looked and saw what had saved them. The pack wavered and fell away, and from a quarter of a mile away came the crackling of a bivouac fire. A party of Stanislas's men were camping for the night not far off.

It was fortunate that night was near. The second enemy never saw the two riders stealing off into the shadows. They would have been easy prey, for speed was impossible. But this was how the message got through and Revik was saved.



Ivan's sword flashed in the air, and his companion's revolver cracked! (See "The Messengers" on opposite page)