

The HERO of TUCKMINSTER!

By

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This is not the first time that William George Bunter, of Greyfriars, has burst into print, but we hasten to add that his style of spelling is, as usual, all his own; and we strongly suspect that, in his modest way, Bunter has modelled his hero on his own fat self!—Ed.



THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE FEED

THE name of the hero of this thrilling skool story is Billy Buster.

Billy Buster was in his study enjoying a whacking grate feed, when his loyle chums, Feeder and Gorge, rolled in.

"Help yourselves, chaps!" said Billy Buster, his handsum face beaming hospitably. "My treat, you know!"

"Thanks awfully, Buster, old chap!" corussed Feeder and Gorge gratefully, as they sat down and attacked the grub with rellish. "It's very jenniferous of you, we must say."

"Of corse it is. It's my nature to be jenniferous and kind-harted," was Buster's answer, as he pollihed off a cupple of pork pies.

For the next five minnits or so, no sound was heard in the study save the stedy munching of tuck. Let us take advantage of the interval, deer reeder, to learn a little about the central figger of this enthrawling romance of public skool life.

Billy Buster was the handsumest, cleverrest fellow in the Fourth Form at Tuckminster. He was far and away the best skoller in the Fourth, and but for the ignorance of his Form-master, Mr. Littlegrub, who didn't know a jeenius when he saw one, Buster would have been at the

top of the Form. As it was, however, he was at the bottom.

At games, our hero was brilliant. He could score goals by the duzzen at krikket and runs by the hundred at football; in fact, Buster was the best all-round sportsman that had ever been seen at Tuckminster. Sad to relait, his amazing jeenius at games was rarely if ever displayed. Solely owing to the jellusy of Skelleton, the skipper of the Fourth, Buster was barred from the Form team. It's rotten to think of the lengths to which jellusy will carry some fellows, but the sad trooth must be told.

In appearance, Buster was strikingly good-looking. He had a boolet head and a perfectly-rounded snub nose of a dellicate shade of pink; his cheeks and chin had the graceful lines of a half-filled balloon and his eyes, though small, were intelligent. Skelleton called them piggy and cunning, but that was sheer prejudice. The ongsomble (French) was very striking, and Buster's face might well have eggsited envy in the brest of many a famous film star.

But Billy Buster's crowning glory was his figger. If you imajine it bore any resemblance to the lean and hungry-looking figgers of Skelleton, Bones, Broomstick and Waystead, the so-called leaders of the Fourth, you're jolly well mistaken. As a matter of fact, it resembled more closely than anything I can think of at the moment, a barrel. To get down to brass tax, Buster was well covered. He was not tall; but what he lacked in height, he made up for in width. Many Fourth-Formers compared him with a porpuss or a hippopotomuss, but, needless to say, that was only another eggsample of the jellusy of the beasts.

Now let us get back to the eggsiting

events of this thrilling narrative. Buster and Feeder and Gorge were just coming to the end of the whacking grate feed which Buster had so Jennerously provided, when there was a thunderous crash on the door, and three skinny-looking rotters looked in. They were Skelleton, the Fourth kaptin, and his pals, Broomstick and Bones.

Skelleton & Co. looked awfully eggsited.

"Where's our grub, you fat brigand?" roared Skelleton feercely. (That was the pleasant way the beast had of addressing the brilliant jeenius.)

Most fellows would have been fearfully scared at being spoken to in this way by the kaptin of the Fourth, for Skelleton had a bit of a reputation as a boxer. But Billy Buster feared no foe in shining armour. He simply eyed the enrajed kaptin with a skornful glarnse.

"How the dickens should I know?" he retorted calmly.

That reply seemed to enrage Skelleton still more. He pointed a trembling finger at the remains of Billy Buster's feast.

"By the look of things, you've skoffed it all, you fat scoundrell!" he hooted.

Billy Buster recoiled, as from a blow.

"Does that mean you accuse me of pinching your grub?" he asked, his handsum face a study in outraged innersense.

"It jolly well does!"

"Well, if that's not the limit!" breathed Buster, as the full meaning of the accusation pennytrated his branebox. "Chap can't have a feed in the privvacy of his own study now without being accused of pinching the grub! What next, I wonder?"

"Shame!" cride Feeder and Gorge,



"I can manage this myself, you fellows!" exclaimed Buster, hitting out at Skelton & Co. Biff! Skelton was laid out with one mighty swipe. Thud! Broomstick collapsed in a limp heap. Crash! Bones fell like a log.

their handsom, well-fed faces dark with anger.

Skelton, however, was not to be put off.

"That grub was mine!" he roared.

"It jolly well wasn't!" yelled Buster indignantly. "I bought it at the tuckshop!"

"Pinched it from my study, you mean!" howled Skelton.

Buster fairly gasped with indignation. It really was a bit thick to have his word doubted like this. All the grub that had just been consumed—or nearly all of it—had been bought at the skool shop that afternoon. Billy Buster had received several postal-orders for large sums of munny

from some of his numerous titled relations and had eggspended it freely. And if, by any chance, some of the grub had been taken from Skelton's study, Buster had merely borrowed it, fully intending to pay it back afterwards, so there was no need to make a song about it.

"Now look here, Skelton," said Billy Buster, patiently.

"Hand over our grub!" bawled Skelton.

"If you're going to adopt this manner, I shall decline to discuss the matter any further," said Buster, with quiet dignity.

"The grub or a licking—which?" roared Skelton, in boolying tones.

Billy Buster smiled. If there was any question of a licking, he was quite prepared to take all the lickings Skelleton could give him!

"Spare me, old chap!" he cried, sarkastically.

Skelleton attacked him instead.

Crash! Bang! Wallop!

The skipper's bony fists crashed into Buster's handsum face with terrific force. They were fearful blows—blows that would hastily have felled an ox—but Buster meerly larfed at them.

"I wish you'd stop tickling me, Skelleton!" was all he said.

Skelleton turned to his followers.

"Come and help me, you fellows! We'll lick him by fare means or fowl!" he cried fewriously.

Broomstick and Bones, with horse cries, rushed to the help of their leader and the three skinny beasts made a tremenjous onslawt on Buster.

Our hero, however, was more than a match for Skelleton & Co. He calmly waved back Feeder and Gorge, who jumped to their feet with the idea of assisting him.

"I can manage this myself, you fellows!" he said.

Biff!

Skelleton was laid out with one mitey swipe.

Thud!

Broomstick collapsed in a limp heap.

Crash!

Bones fell like a log.

"Now chuck them out, you fellows, and perhaps we can finish our feed in piece!" yawned Buster, flicking a speck of dust from his Eton jacket.

Feeder and Gorge grinned and carried out the limp bodies of Skelleton & Co. After which, the interrupted feed was finished amid much rejoicing.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

BUSTER THE BRAVE!

UNFORCHUNITLY, that wasn't the end of the incident of the missing tuck. Shortly afterwards, Meager minor of the Third poked his lantern jaws round the study door.

"Billy Buster wanted in the Head's study!" he announced breefly, then buzzed off.

Feeder and Gorge looked awfully serious. A summons to the Head's study was no joke. Usually it ended up in a weeping and wailing and nashing of teeth. Dr. Scarecrow, the vennerable headmaster of Tuckminster, was a brute and a booly, who tempered injustiss with no mersy. A savvidge tiger, thirsting for gore, was quite a meek kind of creature compared with Dr. Scarecrow.

"Been up to more of your reckless pranx, Buster?" asked Feeder, simperthetically. "Better stuff your baggs with exercise-books if you have. You know what a terror the Head is when he gets going!"

But Buster's conscience was quite clear, though it must be admitted that he looked a trifle uneasy.

"Don't worry, chaps!" he cried, reassuringly. "I am innersent of wrongdoing. If the Head thinks I pinched his feed, he's jolly well mistaken."

"Has the Head's feed been pinched, then?" asked Gorge.

Buster grinned.

"I fancy Skelleton & Co. could tell you," he answered. "Matter of fact, I happened to overhear them planning to pinch it."

The orther would like to eggsplain here that Billy Buster was a remarkably intelligent youth who was quick to find out what was going on around him. Even at odd moments, such as when he was tying up his shoelaces,



"Yaroooo! Yow-ow-ow! Wooooop!" yelled Buster as Dr. Scarecrow wielded his birch with deadly effect. Suddenly the door was flung open and the terrified voice of Mr. Littlegrub bawled out: "Run for your lives! The school is on fire!"

his sensitive ears would occasionally catch little items of interest—a gift that very few other chaps at Tuckminster possessed.

Leaving his loyle chums shaking their heads dewbiously, Billy Buster strolled cheerfully out of the study and made his way to the most dredded apartment at Tuckminster—the study of Dr. Scarecrow.

Reaching his destination, he kicked open the door and entered.

It was immejately obvious to Buster's practised eye that the Head was in a dickens of a rage. His lean, haggard face was distorted with fury,

his green, glittering eyes were almost bolting out of their sockits and his grate hawk-like nose twitched spasmodically. A less intellijent fellow than Billy Buster would not have perseved these little signs, but Buster took in everything at a glarnse and knew at once that he was "for it."

Dr. Scarecrow showed his fangs in a snarl as Buster entered.

"You gormandising rotter!" he hissed. "You have pinched my tuck!"

Any other fellow in Buster's place would have coward and whimpered for mersy in the aw-inspiring presence

of the Head at that moment. But Billy Buster was made of sterner stuff than that.

Drawing himself up to his full height, he regarded the Head with calm and scornful eyes.

"I never done it!" he said quietly.

"I tell you you did!" hooted the Head.

"And I tell you I didn't!"

"You're guilty!"

"I'm jolly well not!"

"You jolly well are!"

Lack of space prevents the orther rendering this eggsiting conversation in full. Anyway, after about half-an-hour of it, the Head suddenly roared:

"Well, if you didn't take it, who did?"

Billy Buster's lipps set in a firm line.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I cannot sneak," he said with quiet determination. "My skoolboy code of honner makes it impossibul for me to answer your question. But if I could bring myself to do it, I should say that the guilty parties were Skelleton & Co. of the Fourth."

The Head picked up his birch.

"I'll go and see the rotters at once," he muttered. "Woe betide them if they've wolfed the lot!"

Billy Buster laid a restraining hand on Dr. Scarecrow's arm.

"Eggscuse me, sir——" he began.

"Well?" snarled the Head.

"If they tell you I pinched the tuck from them, I hope you won't beleeve them. You can take it from me, sir, that particular feed was bought with the remittances sent me this morning by my titled relations!"

For some eggstraordinary reason, Dr. Scarecrow seemed fearfully annoyed at that. Any reasonable head-master would have felt nothing but

grattitude to Buster for putting him wise. But there was no grattitude in Dr. Scarecrow's hart.

Instead of going out on the warpath against Skelleton & Co., he turned back into the study, skowling savvidgely.

"You admit, then, that you had my tuck?" he said harshly.

"Nothing of the kind, sir!" answered Billy Buster, in surprise.

Buster was continually being surprised by the density of the masters at Tuckminster. Somehow or other, they always misunderstood what he said.

On this occasion, the Head didn't wait for Buster to go into further eggsplication. Without waiting to consider the possibility that he mite be chastising an innersent viktim, whose record was white and unblemished as the drivven snow, Dr. Scarecrow waded in, weelding his birch on Billy Buster with deadly effect.

"Yarooooo! Yow-ow-ow! Wooooop!" yelled Buster, biting his lips till they bled so that he should utter no cry of pain.

How long he mite have had to endure that terribul punishment is a matter for conjecture. Forchunitly, before the Head had really got into his stride, the door of the study was flung open and the terrified voice of Mr. Littlegrub bawled out:

"Run for your lives! The skool is on fire!"

Instantly Dr. Scarecrow dropped his birch and, with a yell of fear, raced out of the room, Mr. Littlegrub following close on his heels.

Billy Buster, calm and undawnted in the face of danjer, strolled out at a more leisurely pace, to find that the whole skool was assembulled in the old quad, watching the feerce

flames roaring up from the roof of the Skool House.

Suddenly, a cry of horror rang out.

"Grate pip! The Head's dawter!"

Billy Buster was startled to see the Head's bewtiful dawter, Gertie Scarecrow, leaning out of a window at the top of the building, ringing her hands pitteously.

Dr. Scarecrow tore his hair, almost fermented.

"Who will save her?" he cride, in a strangled voice.

Nobody answered. Strong men turned pail and brave boys blarnched as they glarnsed at the consewming flames. Skelleton & Co., of the Fourth, slunk out of the way, their neeze knocking at the meer thought of it.

Then a calm voice spoke up.

"Don't worry your fat, sir. I'll bring Miss Gertie down in half a jiffy!"

It was Billy Buster! No sooner had he spoken than he was climbing up the old ivy with the ajillity of a monkey. In about three seconds he had shinned up the hundred-odd feet that separated Miss Gertie from the ground, heedless of the roaring flames that raged around him. Pawsing only to fling the helpless girl over

his shoulder, he then dessended, and a few seconds later had restored Gertie Scarecrow to her doating father, while the skool cheered itself horse.

"Buster!" sobbed Dr. Scarecrow. "My brave Buster! You have returned good for evil!"

"That's all right, sir!" grinned our hero. "I'm used to doing things like that!"

"Only to think that I was licking you a short time ago!" muttered the Head. "The thought makes me feel awfully greeved. Is there anything I can do to repay you, Buster? Meerly name it, and I will do it!"

"Well, there is something, as a matter of fact!" grinned Buster. "Just at the moment I'm feeling awfully peckish. If you could see your way clear to standing me a feed in the tuckshop, sir——"

"The plezzure is mine!" said the Head immejately, and, without further ado, he led the way to the tuckshop.

And the orther is glad to be able to add that the feed was one that could be called really worthy of the suspicious occasion. The Head did himself proud, so to speak, in standing treat to the Hero of Tuckminster!

