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The Outlawed THREE



A WESTERN STORY
OF
SMOKING GUNS
AND
THE LURE OF GOLD

"STICK 'em up, doc!"
Doc Baker, the six-gun doctor of Arizona, pulled in his horse as a burly, bearded figure suddenly rose into view behind a rugged boulder, with levelled gun and sharp challenge. But he did not lift his hands, although he recognised Pike Jadson, outlaw and rustler, and one of the toughest ruffians in the notorious Jadson gang.

"You doggoned piccan!" growled the doc. "Pack up your hardware and quit. I guess I got no time to lose on you. I got to see a patient on the other side of the mesa, and I got twenty miles to ride yet—after thirty out from Parksville!"

"Then I'll say your cayuse can do with a rest," grinned Pike. "You're finishing the trail on foot! That's a good critter you got, and I guess he's worth a hundred dollars!"

The grin faded from the outlaw's face, and it set grim and savage.

"I said stick 'em up, Doc Baker, and I'm not waiting!"

Slowly the doc's hands went up over his stetson. His face was white with rage. Doc Baker's medical rounds led him over dangerous trails, and he packed a gun at his hip, which he had used often enough. But he had no chance to pull it now.

Pike Jadson stepped from behind the boulder, his gun still covering the doctor. The doc's eyes flashed round in a swift glance. He had thought for a moment that he had ridden into the Jadson gang, and he knew that Kid Byrne, Dan Oak, and Tom Redway, the cowboys from the Rojo Ranch, were riding with the bunch. They would not have stood for this. It was only the scheming of Hardfist Hall, marshal of Bullwhacker, that had made them turn outlaws, and they were not hold-up men.

But now the doc saw that Pike was alone; the rest of the Jadsons were not on hand. The outlaw had been camped for the night in the canyon, and the sound of the doc's horse had turned him out of his blankets.

"Lissen, you," said the doc, between closed lips, staring grimly over his horse's ears at the outlaw. "I got friends in the Jadson gang now, Pike, since the Rojo cowboys joined up with Jad. I got their uncle, old Sam Oak, at my shack at Parksville, and I reckon I saved his life. I tell you, Dan and Kid and Red will make you pay for it when they find you rustled my horse and stopped me on the way to see a patient."

Pike grinned derisively. "That cuts no ice, doc! The Rojo outfit ain't riding with the Jadsons no more. I guess if Jad met up with them it would be shooting on sight."

Doc Baker started. It was news to him—good news—that the Outlawed Three were not hitched up with the rustlers any longer. But it washed out his last hope of riding on his way.

A desperate gleam came into the doc's eyes. The savage-faced rustler was ready to pull trigger at the first sign of resistance, but a sick man was waiting for the doc twenty miles away, and when on the path of duty, Doc Baker was the man to take desperate chances.

"Keep 'em up, doc!" said Pike, stepping nearer.

The next moment he gave a yell. The doc, still with his hands above his head, his reins loose on the horse's neck, suddenly jabbed his spurs into the bronco's flanks.

The startled animal leaped forward with a squeal, tossing its head. Only a swift bound aside, saved Pike Jadson from being hurled over by the leaping bronco.

But even as he sprang aside he fired, and the roar of his gun echoed down the canyon to the plains. The hurried shot missed Doc Baker by a foot, and the excited horse charged wildly on, clattering furiously up the rocky canyon.

Bending low in the saddle, grasping the reins, spurring fiercely, Doc Baker rode madly. He had taken a long chance—the longest of chances—but so swiftly and suddenly had he acted that he looked like getting away with it.

But only for a moment! The enraged outlaw was pumping bullets after him. A scream of agony came from the bounding bronco, and it pitched forward on its forelegs and rolled over, flinging the doc over its head.

That fall on the rocky earth jarred every bone in the doc's body; but it probably saved his life, for bullet after bullet whizzed over him as he sprawled.

The doc's eyes blazed. Even as he rolled on the earth he whipped his gun out of its holster. Without rising, he glared back at the outlaw.

Pike Jadson was coming on at a run, smoking Colt lifted in his hand. He fired again as he came, and the bullet chipped the rock by the doctor's elbow. Then Doc Baker's revolver roared in answer, and Pike went over backwards with a crash, shot through the heart.

The doc sprang to his feet. He ran towards the fallen rustler, his gun ready for another shot. But it was not needed. Pike Jadson, crumpled on the rocks, did not stir again.

Only one glance the doc gave him, then he turned to his horse. His face set savagely as he looked down at the dead bronco. He had beaten the outlaw to it, but he had lost his cayuse.

"Doggone him!" growled the doc. "Dog-gone the pesky hoss thief!"

The doc wasted no time. The sun was up over the mesa now; a new day waking on the mountains of Arizona. He was weary from the long night-ride; but he did not think of that.

He unstrapped his bag from the saddle and slung it over his shoulder. Then, with a grim face, he started tramping up the rugged canyon on foot, and slowly but surely the long, steep

miles passed under his feet, till suddenly, as he came round a bend of the canyon, where a tall cottonwood-tree grew close beside the river, Doc Baker halted, staring blankly at the strange and unexpected sight that met his startled eyes!

HARDFIST HALL, marshal of Bullwhacker, stood in the very shadow of death.

Only the day before he had ridden out of the cow town, where he ruled as marshal, at the head of his men, to hunt Dan, Kid, and Red, the Rojo cowboys now outlawed in the heart of the mesa—to hunt them down ruthlessly to their death. He had driven them into outlawry by a false charge, and the rope was ready for them when they were rounded up. And now—

Now he stood, a bound prisoner, in their hands, with a rope ready for his own neck!

His haggard eyes looked from face to face of the Outlawed Three, seeking a sign of mercy, and finding none. Dan Oak's tanned face was hard and grim; Kid Byrne's features set in pitiless determination. Only in Red's plump face was there a trace, perhaps, of wavering.

Red, the youngest of the three, perhaps had a touch of pity for the hard-fisted marshal of Bullwhacker, bitter and relentless enemy as he had been to him and his comrades. But Red did not speak. It was for the others to decide—and Hardfist's hour had come.

"You dare not!" Bill Hall muttered huskily, though he knew the words were idle. "You'll be hunted down like wolves and strung up for this! Doggone you, you dare not swing me on that rope!"

"Hunted down like wolves!" said the Kid bitterly. "Aw, you're sure forgetting, marshal! Ain't we hunted like wolves already—on the charge of shooting old Sam Oak, the man that cared for us when we was little kids, and that we'd have died for willing? Ain't you got us outside the law, and ain't every man's hand agin us already?"

Then Dan Oak broke in grimly:

"Quit chewing the rag, marshal! You've worked this, and it's come home to you. You wasn't trailing us for shooting up old Sam—you knowed we never did that—but you wanted to find us to get at the secret of the lost

gold mine of the mesa. I'll tell all Arizona it was you that shot-up old Sam, after you couldn't bluff him into selling his land with the gold-strike on it!"

Bill Hall's black-bearded face grew white. He looked down the vast canyon, his eyes following the course of the Rio Rojo, streaming and rippling away to the lower plains.

Somewhere in that wilderness of rock and pine lay the gold-mine—lost for forty years—which the Rojo cowboys had struck. His eyes would never fall on it now.

"String him up, boys!" snapped Kid. "He may be the marshal, but he's nothing but a low-down, double-crossing skunk!"

Dan Oak swung a rope over a high, horizontal branch of the great cottonwood under which they stood. The loop came down, dangling within a few feet of the marshal's despairing face. He shivered.

Where were his men? Miles away in the ravine where the Rojo cowboys had trapped them. There was no help—no rescue!

Dan held the end of the rope. Kid took the noose, and with steady hands passed it round the neck of the marshal of Bullwhacker.

Hall's voice broke out, hoarse and husky. "Let up! I guess I'm ready to talk turkey, and I reckon that's what you want! I'll stand for anything you say. I'll withdraw the charge agin you and see you clear. I'll let up on the mine!"

"It's too late, Bill Hall!" said the Kid quietly. "If you'd stood for that a few weeks ago, you wouldn't be there now with a rope round your neck. We was peaceable in the old Rojo Ranch with old Sam; we never wanted trouble with you or with any other guy. We're outlaws now. But the Rojo mine will make old Sam rich when Doc Baker's pulled him through; and I'll say that old Sam would never raise an ounce of dust from it if you was around to rob him. You got to get yours, Bill Hall. I'd trust you no more'n a lobo-wolf!"

Dan drew a deep breath.

"Pull!" he said curtly. The Outlawed Three dragged on the rope together with all their strength. Heavy and bulky as he was, the marshal of Bullwhacker swung off his feet, swinging up towards the high branch, his feet a couple of yards clear of the ground.

Dan took a turn of the rope-end round the trunk of the cottonwood, and knotted it. Red, with pale lips, turned his face away. Dan and Kid stared grimly at the marshal as he swung.

None of them saw a stetson hat that appeared among the rocks down the bend of the canyon. A few moments more—

Crack, crack, crack, crack! The sudden roar of a six-gun awoke a thousand echoes, rolling back like thunder from the rocks. Dan and Kid and Red started. They stared round, for the moment figuring that they were under fire. But none of the whizzing bullets came near them.

There was a heavy thump. The swinging marshal dropped heavily to the ground. Four shots, fired so swiftly that they blended into one, had cut clean through the rope!

THERE was a roar of rage from the Kid. He gripped his gun and swung round towards the figure that came running up the canyon. His gun was half-raised when he recognised Doc Baker.

"The doc!" panted Kid.

"Doc Baker!" breathed Red. A flash of relief came over Red's plump face. He stood in with his comrades; but his heart was not in that deed of grim and ruthless justice.

Dan's rugged, tanned face set hard. Doc Baker, the smoking revolver in his hand, came panting up. On the ground lay Hardfist Hall, struggling.

"Doc! You'll stand by a guy!" His voice came husky and cracked. "You ain't standing for this, doc! You got to stand by the law—"

"Aw, pack it up, you!" snarled the doc. "You make use of the law when you want. Hardfist; but other times, I guess you don't give a continental red cent for all the law in Arizona! I guess I'm thinking more of the boys than of your neck! But you ain't going up on that rope!"

"Stand clear, doc!" The Kid's voice was husky with rage. "We got no trouble with you, and don't want none. But"—he raised his revolver—"it's you or me, doc, if you chip in here!"

"Kid!" panted Red. Kid Byrne did not heed him. His eyes, over his gun, gleamed at the doctor. He was ready for gun-play, and all Tontine County knew how quick the six-gun doctor was with a Colt. The marshal, haggard and panting, lay between them, hope mingled with despair in his bearded face. He had been snatched back from death, but the shadow still hovered over him.

The doc did not lift his revolver. Quietly he pushed it back into his hip pocket. He stood unarmed, facing the Kid's Colt.

"Shoot, if you want, Kid!" he said. "Shoot the man that's been your friend since you stood no higher than my stirrup—the man that's tending old Sam and saving his life. If you want old Sam to hear that I've been shot-up by one of his boys, pull trigger, you young peican! What's stopping you?"

"Doc!" muttered the Kid hoarsely. The gun swayed in his hand. Had the doc lifted his revolver it would have been shooting—and one or both would have gone down on the rocks of the mesa. But the doc had packed his gun.

"Shoot, doggone you!" growled the doc.

But the Kid's hand sank down, with the gun in it. Doc Baker stooped to the marshal. He jerked the throttling noose from Hardfist's neck, and then, with a knife, slashed through the rope that fastened his arms and legs. Bill Hall staggered to his feet, a free man.

Again the Kid half-lifted his gun.

"Will you step out of this, doc?" he growled.

"Nope!" was the brief answer.

"You figure that you're getting that dog-goned lobo-wolf away from us, after we've cinched him and got him where we want him?"

"You pesky young goob!" said the doc. "I figure that I'm keeping you from breaking the law so's it can't be mended! And if you've got a hoss, I'll ask you to lend it to me—I got a sick man waiting for me on the other side of the mesa, and one of the Jadsons shot-up my cayuse."

"I got a hoss that I rustled from a Mexican bandit," said the Kid, "and you're welcome

to the critter—if you'll put your leg over the saddle, pronto, and ride clear."

The doc grinned.

"I guess I'll ride hell-for-leather, when I see the last of Hardfist," he said. "You ain't stringing up no marshals, you'uns! I allow you're outside the law now, but you got to leave yourselves a hole to crawl back sometime. You get me?"

Hardfist stood breathing deep. He was calculating the chances of a spring to cover among the rocks. Bullets would be flying when he stirred—but he was ready to take chances.

"That cayuse is tied up in some post-oaks, up the canyon, doc!" said the Kid softly. "You'll hit the spot in ten minutes on the hoof. And you want to start right now."

"Guess again!" said Doc Baker. "Then stick up your hands, doggone you, and we'll sure hog-tie you while we string up that lobo-wolf!" yelled the Kid savagely, and his gun flashed up and looked the doctor in the face.

"You're loco, Kid, plumb loco!" panted Red, and he jumped at the Kid, caught his arm, and dragged it down.

The Kid wrenched savagely at his arm.

"Cin'ch that young goob, Dan!" he roared. And Dan Oak, grasping Red with his powerful hands, dragged him forcibly away from Kid Byrne.

It was at that moment that Hardfist took his chance. The Kid's gun was down at his side—Dan was grasping Red; and it was a chance. The marshal of Bullwhacker made a swift, backward leap that covered six feet—and plunged among the boulders by the bank of the Rojo.

Up swept the Kid's arm, and his finger tightened on the trigger. The gun roared, but it missed Bill Hall by inches, as he hunted cover in the rocks. Kid Byrne leaped in pursuit of the fleeing marshal, Doc Baker forgotten now. The ring of his revolver came echoing back after he had disappeared from sight among the rocks.

Dan gave the doc a dark, bitter look, and without a word hurried away after Kid Byrne. Red stood hesitating, then he followed his comrades.

Doc Baker stood looking after them, but only for a moment. Then he turned from the spot and went tramping up the canyon. Duty to his patient came first with the six-gun doctor; and a sick man was waiting for him on the northern side of the mesa.

He found the horse tethered in the post-oaks, mounted it, and rode on his way; and as he went, the ringing of distant shouts told that the Rojo cowboys were still hunting the marshal of Bullwhacker like a wolf among the rocks.

HARDFIST HALL shut his teeth on a groan. The hard-fisted marshal of Bullwhacker was very near despair.

Under the blazing sun of Arizona, he sweated and panted among the rugged rocks that were hot to the touch. By a miracle, almost, he had been saved from the rope; and it seemed to be by a series of miracles that he had, so far, escaped the fierce search of the Outlawed Three.

With a gun in his hand he would not have feared them—even the three of them together. But he had no weapon; and they were hunting him, to shoot on sight.

Now he lay panting on the summit of a high bluff, round the base of which, twenty feet below, the Rio Rojo whirled and foamed.

The desperate thought was in his mind of flinging himself into the river if they trailed him there. Spent with his exertions, he lay hidden by the inequalities of the rugged summit of the bluff, panting for breath, and listening—listening with cocked ears, like the hunted wolf he was.

They were hot on his track—the sound of a shout came to his ears from a little distance. He heard the clinking of loose stones under tramping feet.

A shadow fell across the marshal's desperate face, blotting out the burning blaze of the sun. His heart seemed to miss a beat. A few more steps—and he would be seen! A voice called—the deep tones of big Dan Oak.

"I reckon we're close on that coyote! You see him, Red?"



"String him up, boys!" snapped Kid. "He may be the marshal, but he's nothing but a low-down, double-crossing skunk!"

"Nope!" called back Red. It was Red, the marshal knew now, who was standing so near that his shadow fell on him.

Hall hardly breathed. Red had clambered on top of the bluff overlooking the Rojo—Dan was farther behind; the Kid, he reckoned, had gone on to make sure of cutting him off from the plains. The shadow stirred; Red's footsteps were audible as he moved. Bill Hall could have groaned aloud with the bitter suspense. But no sound came through his shut teeth.

He heard a quick intake of breath. Red stood almost over him, staring down at him as he lay crouched in the rocks. Bill Hall's eyes, looking up, met Red's staring down. He read the startled surprise in the boy's plump face as so suddenly coming on his quarry.

Red's lips opened for a call. The blackness of despair settled on the crouching man. Dan Oak was only a lasso's length away—revolver in hand. One word from Red—

To his amazement that word was not uttered. Red's lips closed again without a sound. Bill Hall's eyes were glued to his—doubting, questioning. Something in that hunted, haggard, despairing face had gone to the boy's heart; there was hesitation, pity, in the plump, ruddy face.

For a long, long moment, Red looked down at him; then, still silent, he turned away as if he had seen nothing.

Hardfist drew a long, quivering breath. He was spared—Red had spared him. He had no such mercy to look for from Dan or Kid—they were hunting him with hearts as ruthless as his own.

Red went tramping over the summit of the bluff, as if still in search. Dan's voice called again from the canyon.

"You, Red! You got any sign of that lobo-wolf?"

Hall trembled as he waited for Red's answer. Instead of answering, the boy went clattering down the slope into the canyon and joined Dan there. Then his voice came to the marshal.

"I guess we better get after Kid, Dan!"

"I don't reckon Hardfist got past this!" came Dan's deep growl. "Kid's watching the river—he might take to the Rojo. He'll get him, sure, if he does! I guess I'll give that bluff the once-over."

"Aw, come on, Dan—you're sure wasting time."

"You young pican! What you giving me?" There was a fierce note of suspicion in Dan's voice. "You seen that lobo-wolf, and you letting down your side-kickers, Red?"

Bill Hall heard every word, and his heart almost ceased to beat. Something in Red's looks had made Dan suspicious. He heard the younger boy's faltering reply.

"Dan, ol' timer, I reckon Doc Baker was right! I guess—"

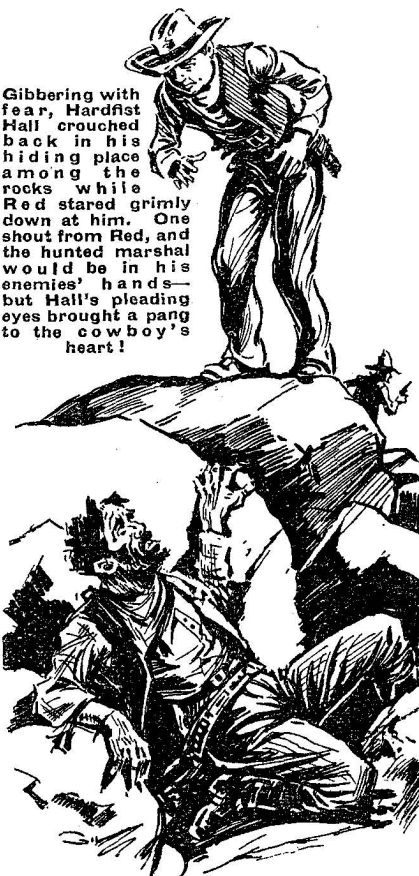
"Can it!" snarled Dan. "You seen sign of him!"

Dan's burly figure loomed on the summit of the high, rocky bluff. There was plenty of cover for the hidden man, so long as the searchers were at a little distance. But close at hand they could not fail to spot him. Hardfist heard the tramping of Dan's boots on the rock, quartering the ground like a hunting dog, searching. It was a matter of minutes now—To leap from the bluff into the Rojo below and take his chance—such as it was—was all that was left. But the Kid, gun in hand, was watching the lower river—Hardfist knew that now. He would be riddled with lead as he went down with the current.

Hardfist half-rose—and sank back again. There was no chance—no chance. Doc had saved him—Red had spared him—but in a few moments more Dan's gun would be blazing death.

Tramp, came the heavy boots, past the

Gibbering with fear, Hardfist Hall crouched back in his hiding place among the rocks while Red stared grimly down at him. One shout from Red, and the hunted marshal would be in his enemies' hands—but Hall's pleading eyes brought a pang to the cowboy's heart!



crevice in which Hall lay crouched. Looking up, he saw Dan's brawny shoulder. A second more, and Dan would have seen Hardfist, and the gun would have been turned on him. In that second, Bill Hall gathered all his strength and made a desperate spring.

His grasp fastened on Dan Oak, even as Dan saw him. But he dragged down the gun-arm, and the shot that was instantly fired missed him and spattered on the bluff. Then, in Hardfist's desperate grasp, Dan Oak was struggling, the marshal's muscular grip pinning his gun-arm down to his side.

A hiss of rage came through Dan's shut teeth. Big and strong as he was, he was not so powerful as the six-foot marshal of Bullwhacker. They struggled fiercely, staggering to and fro, locked in a deadly grip, almost on the verge of the bluff, where it dropped steep as a wall to the foaming waters of the Rojo.

"Red!" yelled Dan.

Red came racing across the top of the bluff. Hardfist felt rather than saw him coming. Red's outstretched hand was almost touching him, as he rushed to the help of his comrade, when Hardfist, with a last fierce effort, bore Dan Oak backward.

But Dan Oak's grasp did not relax, and as he fell, the marshal of Bullwhacker fell with him. They reeled together on the edge of the bluff, and Red gave a cry of horror, grasping at them too late. Still locked in a desperate grasp, Dan Oak and the marshal of Bullwhacker pitched headlong over the rocky verge into space.

"Dan!" shrieked Red.

With a face white as chalk, he throw himself down on the edge of the bluff and stared down at the river roaring twenty feet below. He saw the two whirling figures, still savagely grasping, strike the water where it boiled and foamed among the rocks at the foot of the bluff.

"Dan!" shrieked Red again.

Round the base of the bluff the Rojo roared with the force of a torrent. Dan and the marshal plunged deep, disappearing from the horrified eyes of Red above.

Deep in the foaming waters the desperate grasp was unloosed. Red saw the marshal rise from the water, to be whirled away at once by the rushing current. But where was Dan?

Another head appeared—a hand was flung up. Dan Oak was swimming—or striving to swim. But he had been less fortunate than his enemy; his head had struck on a rock in the river, and he was dazed, half-stunned. Only for a moment Red glimpsed him, then he was swept away after the marshal, whirling in the rushing waters of the Rojo.

Red scrambled to his feet, to dash down from the bluff and race along the bank in the hope of yet helping his comrade. But he knew that he could not help him; there was only one hope—the Kid was watching the river below.

Kid Byrne was watching!

He was watching like a cat, gun in hand, ready for the hunted man, whether he came creeping among the rocks or desperately swimming the Rojo. And it was in the river that he spotted him—the dark, tanned face, the black beard suddenly appearing in the shining, rushing water.

Grimly the Kid's handsome face set, and his gun came sharply up, his eye gleaming along the barrel. Perhaps the glimmer of the levelled gun in the sunshine caught Hardfist's eyes, for he ducked under, even as the Kid pulled trigger, and the bullet splashed the water over his head.

The Kid ran down to the bank, ruthlessly ready for another shot as soon as the dark head appeared—and Hardfist Hall's life could have been counted in seconds. Then the Kid's startled eyes spotted another head in the water—a head that dipped, and dipped again, as the swimmer struggled in vain for life in the rushing waters.

"Dan!" yelled the Kid.

He forgot Hardfist Hall. He jammed the revolver into his holster and plunged headlong into the Rojo. With powerful strokes he drove out from the bank, exerting every ounce of strength to reach the struggling form before it was whirled past and out of his reach.

Dan, half-senseless, was still feebly struggling when the Kid's grasp fastened on him and dragged him up. Holding him with one hand, keeping his face above the water, the Kid swam with the other. The river rushed them on, the Kid striving to reach the bank. But the fierce waters tugged, and he was dragged on and on.

Twice he reached the rocky bank and clutched, but his grasp was swept away again. Then a third time he reached it, grasped desperately at a jutting rock, and held. Where was Red? He held on for his life, and Dan's life, and tried to shout, but only a husky gasp came. The rushing water whirled and dragged and tugged.

There was a shout on the rocky bank, a clatter of running feet.

Even as the Kid's grasp was slipping, Red reached him, gripped him and dragged him up the steep bank. At the very end of his tether the Kid wrenched Dan from the hungry waters, and sank down beside him on the rocks.

A mile away down the river, where it ran between grassy banks on the plain, Hardfist Hall dragged himself from the Rojo, and lay exhausted in the grass for a long hour before he was able to gain his feet and stagger away.

"I guess it was my fault!" muttered Red. Dan, sitting on a boulder, rubbed the bruise on his head. The Kid was quietly cleaning his six-gun. Red looked from one to the other.

"My fault!" he mumbled.

Dan grunted—the Kid smiled.

"Aw, can it!" they said together.

By a cruel stroke of fate the Outlawed Three have been robbed of victory at the very moment when it was within their grasp. Marshal Hall is free to bound down his victims once more—and now he has an added reason for silencing their mouths for ever, provided he can once learn the secret of the gold mine in the Mesa Mountains. Does he succeed?—for the answer, read next week's great story!

Anybody looking for a really first-class game? Three new ones have recently come on to the market, which promise to liven things up considerably this Christmas. They are "Mappa Mundi," which costs 3/6 and includes a jig-saw puzzle big enough to cover a fair sized table; "Bob's yr Uncle," and "Alfa Cubes." "Bob's yr Uncle," incidentally costs 1/6, and "Alfa Cubes," 1/-. I have played them all, so I can personally vouch for their excellence. Get 'em from your local toy-shop or stationers and prepare for a first-class laugh.