

GRAND FOOTBALL AND MYSTERY STORY BY HEDLEY SCOTT STARTS TO-DAY!

The RANGER 2^D

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**"SKULL of the
SKIES!"**

**THRILL-PACKED
STORY of MODERN
PIRACY
INSIDE**



THE CHEERIO CASTAWAYS!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Caught in the Quicksand!



"Crumbs!" gasped Jim Dainty.

The white sand, glistening in the rays of the tropical sun, looked firm to the tread, as Jim came down the western shore of Castaway Island towards the sea. But appearances were deceptive. Suddenly, with-

out warning, the sand gave under the Grimslade junior's feet, and he felt himself sinking. It was a patch of quicksand, and Jim Dainty had stepped on it without suspicion.

Almost before he knew what was happening Dainty was down to his armpits. He sank almost as swiftly as if he had trodden on water.

His face whitened with horror. He was alone—far from the rest of the shipwrecked Grimsladers on the lonely West Indian island. The sands stretched for miles, broken here and there by rugged rocks. Beyond was the limitless sea. Inland, were the thick woods clothing the lower slopes of the island hill.

Far away, on the eastern side of the island, was the hut of the castaways. There were Dr. Samuel Sparshott, the headmaster of Grimslade School, Ginger & Co., Dawson, and Fritz Splitz. Unless, indeed, they were hunting for the rebel who had run away from the little community!

There was no help. And he was in the grip of the quicksand.

"Oh!" panted Jim.

He was down to his shoulders. His face, drained of colour, stared up at the empty sky, the dazzling sunshine. If he had had time to think, Jim might have repented at that moment of the headstrong obstinacy which had led him to flout his headmaster's authority, and clear off "on his own." But he had no time to think. He was sinking—and with a desperate effort to save himself, he threw out his arms on the sand for support.

But his arms sank in the treacherous surface and went under. He was sinking—sinking—and the surface was up to his neck.

Then, suddenly, he ceased to sink. His feet, deep in the quicksand, rested on something solid. His chin was on the surface; but he sank no further. Another foot of depth, and Jim Dainty would have disappeared from the world of living things.

In the horror of the moment he could hardly believe that he had found support. Then it dawned on him that under the strip of quicksand ran the rock of Castaway Island, and that his boots rested on solid rock.

For a long minute Jim Dainty stood there motionless, buried in sand to his neck, realising that he was, after all, in no danger, but shivering with horror at his narrow escape. Slowly the colour came back to his face.

"My hat!" breathed Jim. "If the quicksand had been deeper—" But he drove that terrible thought from his mind.

It was not easy to stir in the thick clinging sand. He summoned all his strength to struggle his way out of the trap. At a little distance, between him and the sea, was a tract of basaltic rock, cropping up from the beach, and he struggled towards it.

Slowly, foot by foot, almost inch by inch, he forced his way through the sand, and he found his task easier from the fact that the rock



sloped upward under him, shallowing the quicksand.

Clear of the clinging sand at last, the junior sank down on the basalt, exhausted by his efforts, gasping for breath. For a long time he lay there, till he had recovered his strength.

He sat up at last, and looked back at the quicksand. Not a trace remained of his passage across it. The soft, oozy sand had closed up, and the surface was as smooth as when he had first stepped on it. Its width, where he had crossed it, was not more than a dozen feet; but how far its length extended, from side to side, he could not tell.

THE REBEL CASTAWAY WHO WAS NOT SLOW TO MAKE USE OF A QUICKSAND!

The junior rose to his feet and turned towards the sea. He had come down to the water for a bathe, and now he ran down to the lapping margin and plunged in.

Jim Dainty was one of the best swimmers at Grimslade School, and he thoroughly enjoyed himself in the water. He swam a good distance out, revelling in the wash of the waves, and it was some time before he looked shoreward again.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jim, as he lifted his head from the sea and looked. Far away, a tall, active figure was visible against the dark background of the forest, far up the shore. At the distance, Jim could not have recognised his headmaster but for the tattered mortar-board that Sammy still wore, and from his knowledge that Dr. Sparshott was the only man on Castaway Island.

Treading water, Jim looked at the distant figure. Dr. Sparshott was alone; there was no sign of any of the boys with him. Ginger & Co. had hunted for Jim the day before, in vain, and now, evidently, the Head was taking the matter in hand himself.

It was doubtful whether even Sammy's keen eyes would have picked out the dark head on the rolling water; but Jim caught a glitter in the sun which told him that Dr. Sparshott was sweeping the shore with his field-glasses.

A few minutes ago Jim had been revelling happily in the sunny water, forgetful of troubles and of enmities. But now his face darkened, his lips set, and a glint came into his eyes. Dr. Sparshott was there to take him back—to hand over the punishment he had asked for!

He was not going back—he was not going to take punishment. He was free—and he was going to stay free!

He saw Dr. Sparshott sling his glasses in their leather case, and come striding down to the sea. Jim knew that Sammy had spotted him. He breathed hard.

Good sprinter as he was, he had no chance in a foot race with Sammy. Good swimmer as he was, Sammy would have overhauled him in the water, hand over fist, and he was already getting a little tired from a long swim. But he was not going to be taken back!

The only chance seemed to be to scramble ashore, and dodge among the wild rocks along the beach, and that he determined to do. Jim swam in, scrambled up the sand, and dressed himself hastily. At the same time a mortar-board bobbed into view from beyond a ridge of rocks. Sammy was getting near at hand.

Then suddenly Jim remembered the strip of quicksand. It lay between him and his headmaster, and—though Sammy did not know it—barred him off more effectually than walls of triple steel.

Jim burst into a laugh. There was no danger to life in the quicksand—he had already proved that. If Sammy stepped into it he would simply be bogged, till he could scramble out, as Jim had done. But that would take him a long time—plenty of time for the rebel of Grimslade to make his escape.

Instead of scudding away along the margin of the sea among the rough rocks, Jim Dainty walked coolly up the beach, as if with the intention of meeting his headmaster. He stopped on the mass of basalt where he had previously rested, and stood facing Dr. Sparshott as he came.

"Dainty!" Dr. Sparshott stopped, and beckoned to him. "I have found you. Come here at once!"

Dainty did not stir. "Do you hear me?" The headmaster of Grimslade raised his voice a little. There was

a tone in it that told how deeply and intensely angry Sammy was with the rebellious junior. "I hear you, sir!" answered Jim. "I'm not coming back."

"I am here to take you back, Dainty."

"Why?" jeered Dainty. "You don't want me! The other fellows don't want me—even my pal Dawson! Leave me alone, then."

"You can scarcely expect anyone to want an obstinate, headstrong, rebellious young rascal, Dainty!" said the headmaster of Grimsdale coldly and scornfully. "But I have my duty to do as your headmaster, and that is to keep you under my care and control, ungrateful and rebellious as you are. I order you to come to me at once!"

"I won't!"

Dr. Sparshott said no more. With glinting eyes, he strode down the beach, straight towards the rebel. Probably he expected Jim to dodge and run; but the junior stood still, watching him, with a mocking grin on his face that Sammy did not understand—till afterwards.

Closer and closer came the tall striding figure, and then suddenly, swiftly, that tall figure shot down, feet first, through the treacherous surface of the quicksand. A startled cry left Dr. Sparshott's lips as he sank.

A Narrow Escape!

"HA, ha, ha!" roared Jim Dainty.

Sammy's long legs had disappeared. The oozing sand was round him, over his waist. Only for an instant he felt, as Jim had felt, a thrill of horror as he sank in the sand. Then his feet rested firmly on the hard rock underneath, and he realised that he was in no peril; but he was held as if in the grasp of invisible fingers, and he dragged at his legs in vain to free them from the clinging sand.

Sammy's eyes turned on Jim with an expression in them that might well have daunted a less reckless fellow. Jim, standing on the basalt, watched him coolly.

"You young rascal!" panted Dr. Sparshott. Seldom had the headmaster of Grimsdale been so angry. "You knew this—you—"

"I've been through it!" answered Jim. "There's no danger, Sammy!"

"What?" roared Dr. Sparshott. Among themselves, the Grimsdale fellows never called Dr. Sparshott anything but "Sammy." But they did not call him Sammy to his face, unless they were looking for trouble. "You are asking for the thrashing of your life, Dainty!"

"Come and give it to me, old bean!" chortled Jim.

Frantically the headmaster of Grimsdale drove through the clinging quicksand; but every step was hard work, his feet dragging as if from depths of glue. His scarlet face streamed with perspiration.

He was still struggling breathlessly and furiously to draw himself out, when Jim turned away. It was time to go.

"Stop!" roared Dr. Sparshott.

The rebel of Grimsdale glanced back.

"Sorry, Sammy—can't stop!" he answered. "See you again another time, old tulip!"

"When I catch you—" breathed Sammy Sparshott.

"When do you think that will be, Sammy?"

Samuel Sparshott did not answer that question. He exerted all his strength to get to the rock where the junior stood; but Dainty waited no longer. He started at a run along the beach, keeping clear of the quicksand; and in a few minutes disappeared from the sight of Dr. Sparshott, who was still struggling to free himself.

By the time Dr. Sparshott dragged himself at last from the clinging sand, the rebel of Grimsdale had vanished. And the feelings of Sammy Sparshott as he hunted for the vanished rebel along the beach were too deep for words.

Dainty was already off the beach. He was threading his way through the wood, where the ceiba-trees grew thickly, laced together with great lianas like ropes, and with huge tree-ferns standing so tall that their tops were lost among the lower boughs of the trees. Here and there grew bananas and plantains, and Jim stopped to pick bunches of the fruit to eat for his lunch.

He sat down on a projecting root of a great

ceiba, with a big bunch of bananas on his knee, peeling one after another and eating them with considerable satisfaction, when a sound of rustling reached his ears.

Instantly he was on the alert. He could hardly believe that Sammy had succeeded in tracking him up from the beach; but he was on his guard at once. Hurriedly pushing the bananas into his rucksack, he clambered actively up the massive trunk of the ceiba, and stretched himself on a thick branch—so thick that it hid him from below. Through the foliage, he peered down. A gasping voice reached his ears.

Dainty grinned. It was the fat voice of Fritz Splitz. The voice of Ginger Rawlinson answered.

"Buck up, you Bocho bloater! I'd rather have left you behind, but Sammy said you were to come!"

"Tat Sammy is a peastly pounder!" groaned Fritz Splitz. "I do not want to look for tat peastly prute Tainty! Also, I was dired!"

A red head emerged into view from the undergrowth. It belonged to Ginger Rawlinson. Following him, under the branches of the ceiba, came Bacon and Bean and Dick Dawson. Last of all lagged Fritz Splitz, his podgy face dripping with perspiration, and as red as Ginger's hair. Stretched silent on the branch above, Jim watched them, unseen and unsuspected.

Fritz Splitz leaned against the trunk of the ceiba, and fanned himself with a palm-leaf. With a fat hand he obliterated about a dozen mosquitoes that had taken a fancy to his fat features.

"Ach! It was derribly hot, and I was pitten all ofer!" he groaned. "Mein gootness! I hope tat Sammy will peat Tainty till he pellow like a pull, for giving us all tis droubles!"

"Buck up, bloater!" said Streaky Bacon.

"I will not puck up after!" roared Fritz. "I was dired, and I takes not anodder step mit meinsel before! Go and eat goke!"

"Roll him along!" suggested Sandy Bean. "Peastly prute!"

"Oh, leave him here!" said Dick Dawson, laughing. "He can follow us down to the beach—even that frowsy foolzer can't lose his way. Take a rest, Fatty, and give us one at the same time."

And the four juniors tramped on, in the direction of the beach, leaving Fatty Fritz to his own devices. Evidently they were going to join Sammy in his search for the rebel; and Fritz Splitz had made a very unwilling addition to the hunting-party.

The fat Rhinelander slid down into a sitting position, leaned back on the ceiba-tree, and gurgled for breath, what time he mopped perspiration from his podgy brow, and fanned his burning, fat face. Jim Dainty, grinning on the branch above, kept very quiet. He had had a narrow escape; and he listened intently for the sounds of Ginger & Co. to die away.

The rustling and the mutter of voices died in the distance; the juniors were gone; but Fritz Splitz remained, squatting in the shade of the big tree. Jim Dainty waited impatiently for him to be gone, too. Certainly, he had no fear of the fat German; but a yell from Fritz might have carried far, and brought the hunters on his track.

But Fritz apparently did not intend to move. He seemed satisfied to remain where he was. Exertion had no appeal for Friedrich von Splitz, and he was not anxious to rejoin the party till it was time for a meal.

He sat and fanned himself and mopped his brow. Two or three monkeys peered down at him from the branches, perhaps wondering what kind of creature it was that was grunting and snorting at such a rate below. Fritz blinked up at them with his saucer-eyes, a little uneasily. He had not forgotten how he had been pelted with coconuts by a monkey.

Neither had Jim Dainty; and it put an idea into his head. Quickly he extracted the bunch of bananas from his rucksack.

Whiz! Plop!

"Mein gootness!" Fritz Splitz scrambled up. "Peastly prutes of monkeys, vill you not let me rest mit meinsel after, ven I was so derribly dired before! Prutes!"

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz! Bananas fairly rained on the fat face of Fritz von Splitz, and he staggered and sat down, roaring. Plop, plop,

plop! came the fat, juicy fruit on his podgy features.

"Ach himmel! Peastly prutes!" yelled Fritz, staggering to his feet. "Ach! I vas all sticky before! Mein gootness, tat peastly panana go down mein neck mit itself after! Urrrrgggh!"

The fat German started at a run. He did not notice as he started that he was taking a direction different from that taken by Ginger & Co. He was thinking of escaping from the pelting of the supposed monkeys.

Jim Dainty chuckled as the fat Rhinelander vanished into the wood, and his gurgling and spluttering died away in the distance. Then the rebel of Grimsdale scrambled down from the tree and resumed his own way.

A Dodge in the Dark!

"RATS!" murmured Ginger Rawlinson. "Oh, my giddy goloshes!"

Dr. Samuel Sparshott set his lips in a tight line. Streaky Bacon, who was disposed to grin, suppressed that grin instantly. Judging by Sammy's expression, it was no time for grinning.

The sun was sinking to the western sea. Dr. Sparshott had been on the hunt for the rebel of Grimsdale since dawn, and but for the incident of the quicksand would certainly have made a capture.

Later the juniors had joined him, after tramping across the island from the hut; and the fact that they had left Fritz Splitz behind them, resting in the wood, did not at first worry Sammy. Even Fritz, it was supposed, would have sense enough to follow the others to the western beach, when he had sufficiently rested his fat and weary limbs.

But he hadn't!

Dr. Sparshott intended to camp on the western side of Castaway Island until the fugitive was captured. Ginger & Co. had carried the necessary things across from the hut. On a level stretch of beach, at a safe distance from the quicksand, the camp had been formed, and the belongings left there, while the Head and the juniors spent the afternoon hunting for Jim Dainty.

They hunted in vain, and came back to camp at sunset, expecting to find Fritz Splitz arrived at last. There was no sign of the fat German, but there was sign that the camp had been visited in their absence.

Traced in the sand, in large capital letters, was the word:

RATS!

Dr. Sparshott gazed at it long and hard. Ginger and Bacon and Bean and Dick Dawson gazed at it. They did not need telling, of course, who had visited the camp and left that message in the sand.

Evidently while they had been hunting for Jim Dainty, the hunted junior had coolly come down the beach from the wood, and left that message for Sammy. In huge letters, each a couple of feet long, cut deep in the sand, it stared the headmaster of Grimsdale in the face.

Sammy breathed hard and deep.

"My giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger. "Dainty's been here, of course, while we were hunting him in the wood!"

"The cheeky tick!" muttered Streaky. "That's meant for us as well as Sammy. Won't I jolly well alter his features for him when I see him."

The juniors hardly dared to look at Sammy. But after the first moment of deep and intense wrath, Sammy was his calm self again.

"Rawlinson, you will take a stick and obliterate that piece of impertinence," said Sammy quietly. "Bacon, Bean, gather wood for a fire. Splitz has not arrived, and there can be little doubt that the foolish fellow has lost himself. The firelight will be a guide to him."

Ginger lost no time in scraping the sand over Jim Dainty's cheeky message. On the smooth beach, a camp-fire was built and lighted. Hot as the days were on Castaway Island, the nights were generally rather cold, and the Grimsdalers were glad of the fire. Dick Dawson sorted out cooking utensils, and there was soon a savoury scent of frying fish.

The castaways sat down on the sand, round the fire, to eat their supper, for which they had very keen appetites after the day's hunting. Logs and branches were piled on the fire, and the blaze leaped up, dancing against

the velvety darkness of the sky as the night descended on the island and the sea.

If the lost Fritz was anywhere near at hand, it seemed certain that the glare of the fire would catch his eyes sooner or later, and guide him to the camp. Ginger remarked that the smell of cooking would have done so still more surely could it but have reached Fritz Splitz's fat nose!

But there was no sign of Fritz, and Dr. Sparshott cast more than one anxious glance at the dark wood above the beach. It was clear that the fat Rhinelander had hopelessly lost himself.

Dr. Sparshott rose to his feet at last. "I am going to look for Splitz and Dainty," he said. "You will remain in camp. Turn in at the usual time if I am not back."

"Yes, sir!" Dr. Sparshott's tall figure disappeared up the beach towards the forest, and vanished among the dark shadows of the trees. And when it had vanished, a figure, that had been lying in cover of a hillock of sand at a little distance from the camp, rose to its knees and crept forward on all fours.

It was Jim Dainty, and he stopped on the edge of the circle of firelight. The four juniors round the camp-fire were talking, and Ginger's voice reached his ears.

"Just like that fat bloater of a Boche to lose himself! It's all Dainty's fault. My giddy goloshes, won't I jolly well hammer that cheeky tick when I get my hands on him!"

"What the thump—" ejaculated Streaky Bacon, as there was a sudden whizzing sound in the silence of the beach. "What's that?"

A terrific roar from Ginger Rawlinson announced what it was. He rolled over backwards, roaring, as a whizzing coconut smote him on the chest. Sandy Bean leaped up.

"What—oh, my hat! Whoop!" A coconut caught his knees, and Sandy Bean went sprawling over Ginger.

"It's Dainty!" yelled Streaky Bacon, catching a glimpse of a grinning face looking into the firelight. "Dainty! After him!"

There was a rush, but only for a moment or two the sound of pattering footsteps was heard on the sand. Jim Dainty vanished into the night, and Ginger & Co., breathing wrath, gave it up and walked back to the fire.

Jim Dainty, chuckling, ran up the sand. There was a sudden crash in the dark as he ran into a moving figure, and a gurgling gasp:

"Mein gootness! Vat was tat? Parge me not ofer, peast and a prute!"

"You blithering Boche!" gasped Jim, staggering from the shock.

"Ach! Vas tat Tainty? Yaroooh! Kick me not on mein trousers!" yelled Fritz Splitz.

"Ach! Whoop! Yaroooh!"

Jim Dainty stayed only for one kick, and then ran on his way up the beach. Gasping for breath, the fat German picked himself up and tottered on towards the camp-fire. By the time he had reached it Jim Dainty had reached the forest and plunged into the darkness under the trees.

His own camp was deep in the tropical forest, and he headed for it, groping his way among the trunks and lianas and tree ferns. He trod cautiously, aware that Sammy Sparshott was somewhere in the wood, searching for Fritz Splitz, and for him also.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Jim suddenly, as there was a rustle and a footstep close by him in the dark.

He halted instantly and squeezed himself

against the trunk of a tree, blotted from sight in the darkness. He tried to still his breathing. It could only be Sammy, and if once that sinewy grasp dropped on his shoulder—

The rustling sound ceased. Sammy stopped, hardly a yard from the junior. And it was borne in upon Jim's mind that Sammy knew that he was there. Before he could make up his mind what to do a hand dropped on his head, slid down to his collar, and fastened like a steel vice.

"Caught, I think!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly.

It was at that moment that Jim had a brain-wave. He was caught—there was no doubt about that. But Sammy could not see him, and Sammy was hunting for the lost Fritz as well as for the rebel.

"Ach! Is tat te Head!" gasped Jim, with a really remarkable imitation of Fritz Splitz's well-known accent. "Mein gootness! I was safed!"

"Splitz!" exclaimed the Head. "Ja wohl!" gurgled Jim.

"I am glad I have found you, Splitz. I fancied for the moment that it was Dainty. Have you seen Dainty?"

"Tat peast and a prute kick me on mein trousers. Since tat time I see him not. Mein gootness, but I vas derribly hungry!"

"Follow me, Splitz! I will take you back to camp at once. Keep hold of my belt, or you will lose yourself in the dark."

"Ach! Ja wohl!"

Jim's collar was released. Holding the back of Sammy's belt, he followed his headmaster. Dr. Sparshott headed for the beach, nothing doubting that it was Fatty Fritz who was following him. But a minute later the hold on his belt was released, and there was a rustle as Jim Dainty darted away into the dark forest.

Dr. Sparshott spun round in angry surprise.

"Splitz!" he shouted, but there was no reply.

The rustling ceased. Jim Dainty was gone. Angry and puzzled, Sammy strode on, left the wood behind, and tramped down the beach to the camp. If Fritz Splitz chose to leave his guide, and lose himself again, he could take his chance till morning. With knitted brows Dr. Sparshott tramped on to the camp-fire.

Ginger & Co. rose as he came up. But there was one figure that did not rise. It was a fat and weary figure—a hungry figure—and it was bolting friend fish at a tremendous rate.

"Splitz!" gasped Sammy.

Fritz blinked up.

"Ach! I vas ferry hungry, sir. Mein gootness, how derribly hungry I vas before! Ach!"

"How did you get here before me!"

stuttered Dr. Sparshott.

"I see te light of te fire, sir, and I gum,"

said Fritz, his mouth full. "It is not half an hour ago tat I gum, so I have not had enoff to eat. Mein gootness, how hungry I vas after!"

"Half an hour ago! Then who—"

Dr. Sparshott broke off. He knew now who had spoken to him in the wood with Fritz's inimitable accent, and pulled his leg. He knew that his grasp had been on Jim Dainty's collar—that he had captured the rebel, and let him go.

Sammy Sparshott said no more. There was nothing to say. No words could have done justice to Sammy's feelings at that moment!

(The rebel castaway is still at large—but Sammy Sparshott will not rest contented until he has captured Jim Dainty. Thrills and surprises in next week's exciting yarn!)

ATLANTIS

(Continued from page 182.)

Still he clung on, his breath coming and going. Then something forced him to peep downwards past his knees. An awesome black gulf yawned there. A bottomless pit that went down and down, seemingly into eternity.

He craned his head round a little and glanced at the greybeard whose draped form poised in silhouette against the moonlight by the grille. Then, as his eyes dropped, he glimpsed another thing—a faint silver ray playing in the gloomy darkness ten feet below the grille.

"Moonlight," he breathed—"creeping through some crack in the paving of the court yard. There must be a tunnel down there Pat—your leg. Throw it—yes, there at the gleam. It's a chance."

"Och, Oi'll nivver be needin' ut agin, any ways!"

The sailor twisted round, hanging by one hand—a feat only his years at sea could have rendered possible. With his free hand he flung the wooden leg across the gulf. He whisked across the ray of light and landed safely on something solid.

"Jump for it!" Bill called. "It's our only chance."

As he spoke, he wriggled round and thrust off fiercely as he fell. He hurtled outwards—downwards—above the inky depths, and landed heavily upon a narrow, projecting slab where the moonlight fell.

He dragged himself erect and stood back in a low tunnel mouth. The Irishman came whizzing down after him. As Pat lay panting on the slab, he groped for and found the wooden leg. Bill strapped it on again, and they plunged into the low tunnel.

Where it led to they could not tell. What pitfalls it held—they knew not either. But they dared not loiter for fear their foe reached the outlet ahead of them.

Now running, now groping, they kept on till at last a beam of light came into view as the tunnel turned a corner.

"The open!" Bill gasped, and dragged the sailor after him.

They stumbled up some broken steps and gained the interior of some narrow, roofless building. Its gateless doorway yawned welcome, and they sprang out into what had been a street. There was no sign or sound of their enemies.

"The tractor!" gasped Bill. "Run, man—before they find us!"

Another instant saw them racing down the empty, weed-grown street, their feet ringin hollow on the age-old stones. For Atlantis they no longer cared.

For them it might still hold its secrets—and the mystery of the gold-decked men.

(Now to get away from this age-old city find their tractor, and continue their quest—but many amazing things are to happen before Bill and Pat escape. In next week's thrilling story you will read how the two partners are again captured by the mysterious grey-bearded man—how they find themselves face to face with death on more. Order next Saturday's seven-stories issue of RANGER now, buddies!)

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