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The RANGER 2^D

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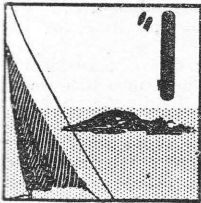


The Escape of Herne the Hunter!

THE CHEERIO CASTAWAYS!

By FRANK RICHARDS

Land in Sight!



"S' Castaway Island!" said Jim Dainty with a deep breath. "What-ho!" said Ginger Rawlinson. "Mein gootness, but tat is goot!" grunted Fritz Splitz. "I vish tat I vas pack in Chermany, but tat peastly island is petter tan tis poat!"

Under the burning tropic sun, the boat surged on slowly, making barely a knot in the light, uncertain breeze. Hardly a cloud was in the sky of deepest azure, hardly a ripple on the indigo sea. It was hot—aching hot, in the boat, exposed to the full power of the sun, on the wide Atlantic. The iron rowlocks were scorching to the touch, the timbers blistered, the tar sticky in the seams. Half the time the sail flapped idly, the wind almost dying away.

But steadily, if slowly, the Grimsladers were drawing nearer to the green hilltop that lifted above the sea—near enough now to be familiar to their eyes. Soon, they hoped, they would see the jungle and the beach, and the hut on the shore where they had lived their Crusoe life. And Jim and Ginger felt their hearts beat faster at the certainty, now, of treading once more the beach of Castaway Island, and seeing Sammy Sparshott and their other friends again. It seemed ages and ages to them since the day when the gale had blown them out to sea.

Friday, the monkey, clinging to the mast, blinked at the distant island with his red-rimmed eyes. Perhaps Friday knew his home again, as the schoolboy Crusoes did. In the bottom of the boat lay the low-browed, bearded, swarthy convict from Devil's Island, with his hands bound behind his back. His black, scintillating eyes watched the juniors, gleaming with venomous animosity. But they did not heed him.

"My giddy goloshes!" said Ginger Rawlinson. "We ought to make the island to-night, Dainty, if even this bit of wind lasts! What about pulling?"

Jim shook his head. Eager as he was to step on Castaway Island again, it was not much use to think of rowing the heavy boat over miles and miles of sea under the burning heat of the sun.

"We'll try, if the wind deserts us, Ginger!" he said. "But we're making way—slow and steady does it!"

There came a growl from the bound ruffian sprawling in the boat.

"De Peau! Give me drink!"

Jim glanced round at him, filled a tin can from a keg, and placed it to the convict's lips. The man hunched himself up against the gunwale to drink. Cramped in his bonds, the man from Guiana felt the scorching heat more than the others. The sweat ran down his harsh face in streams.

"Alors, mon garçon, release me!" he muttered. "Pardieu! It is torture to lie here! Will you release me?"

"Not likely!" answered Jim Dainty contemptuously. "You rascal, we picked you up from the sea and saved your life—and you tried to seize our boat, and would have stabbed us and pitched us into the sea! You'll stay safe as you are till we get to Castaway Island."



"And then?" muttered the convict from Devil's Island.

"Then our headmaster, Dr. Sparshott, will decide what to do with you. If we ever get picked up by a ship, you'll go back where you belong—the best place for you."

Lebon's black eyes blazed at him.

"Ma foi!" he muttered. "Better to go to the sharks in the sea, than back to Devil's Island. But perhaps your schoolmaster will not decide when we reach the island! Perhaps my comrades are already there!" He gritted his discoloured teeth. "Five of them, with their knives—they will make short work of

spiring fat face with a grubby handkerchief, and groaned and groused over the heat. Friday, in his cotton trousers and shirt, sat contentedly scratching himself. Slowly, the heavy old boat surged on, the distant green hilltop seeming to mock the longing eyes of the schoolboys.

"It's going!" grunted Ginger Rawlinson. He mopped a face that was as red as his hair. "It's gone, Dainty!" A last puff of the dying wind flapped the sail, and then it hung against the mast.

Jim Dainty stared towards the island. He could make out the lower slopes of the hill now, dark with verdure. But the shore was still below the sea-line. The sun was sloping down to the burning west, the heat still like that of an oven. The juniors had been fortunate in finding Castaway Island again, after being blown away into the vast Atlantic. But now that they had found it, it mocked them like a mirage.

"We've got to pull!" said Ginger.

Jim Dainty nodded.

"Out with the oars!" he said. "Down with the mast and sail."

It was hard work, killing work, in the tropic heat. But the two juniors put out the oars, and pulled. Once more the boat was under way, surging on towards the distant island. For a long hour they pulled hard and steady.

"Fritz!" snapped Ginger at last. "Come and take your turn, you fat slacker! Are you setting up to be a parlour ornament, you bloated image?"

"Mein gootness! I vas too dired, in tis colossal heat, to row mit oars!" exclaimed Fritz, in alarm. "Tat gan I not do, Chinger."

"I fancy you can, if I begin on you with the boathook!" growled Ginger.

"Peast and a prute!" roared Fritz. "Geep away mit you, mit tat poathook! Vy for tat gootness peast not row te poat?"

Ginger exchanged a glance with Jim. The convict was a powerful and muscular man. He was worth the two juniors together, with Fritz thrown in, when it came to pulling. Both of them had already thought of it, but they thought, also, of the danger of letting him loose, after their experience of his treachery and ferocity. But an hour of deadly exertion in the terrible heat made them inclined to think less of the risk than of their aching muscles.

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THREE BOY CASTAWAYS AND FIVE DESPERATE CONVICTS!

your schoolmaster, hein? Nous verrons—we shall see!"

Jim turned from him in disgust, and there was a cloud on his brow. He stood up, and scanned the sea. Nothing was in sight on the vast stretch of the Atlantic, save that green hilltop far away standing out dark against the blazing blue of the sky. There was no sign of a boat.

Yet somewhere in the waters that washed round Castaway Island must be the boat in which the gang of convicts had escaped from Devil's Island far away on the coast of French Guiana. Lebon, as he called himself, had fallen overboard, in some fierce brawl with his savage companions, probably a famished dispute for some fragment of food. He had been exhausted, on the point of sinking to death, when the juniors picked him up. Where was the boat, with the other five desperadoes in it?

Had it reached Castaway Island—had that fierce and desperate crew landed there? That was a startling and troubling thought to the Grimslade juniors.

Lebon, muttering curses in his own language, crouched in what little shade he could find. Fritz Splitz fanned himself with the lid of a bully beef tin, dabbed his per-

"After all, why not?" said Jim. "We can watch the brute! No need to stand on ceremony with him—if he gives trouble, knock him on the head!"

"I'll watch that!" growled Ginger. "I'm not slogging with this oar while that brute goes nothing! I'll crack his nut for him fast enough, if he gives any trouble. Here, Froggy, up with you, and row."

The convict's black eyes blazed. "Volontiers!" he exclaimed. "As you will!" It was easy to read the treacherous thought in his savage mind, it showed plainly enough in his face. All he wanted was freedom, and another chance of turning on the schoolboys who had saved him, and seizing their boat.

Jim Dainty hesitated a moment. As if to warn him, a black triangular fin showed over the blue water, for a moment, hardly three fathoms from the gunwale. Under the glimmering surface lurked a shark, visible for a fleeting glimpse. For hours the shark had been following the boat, as if in expectation.

But as Jim paused, Ginger laid in his oar, bent over the convict, and began to untie the rope that secured him. Jim Dainty picked up the boathook, and stood on guard. After all, the man was now unarmed, and they were two to one. And without his aid with the oars, it was clearly impossible to reach the island before dark.

As the ropes fell away from his limbs, Lebon rose limply to his feet, and chafed his cramped arms. His black eyes, glittering like a snake's, watched the Grimsladers. Jim gave him a steady look.

"Take the oars and pull, Lebon!" he said quietly. "Mind, I shall be watching you, and I'll knock you senseless at the first sign of trickery."

"Same here!" said Ginger. He took a hatchet from a locker. "Look out for your cokernut, old French bean, if you try any tricks!"

With a shrug of the shoulders, the man from Devil's Island sat to the oars and pulled.

Hand to Hand!

"LOOK!" yelled Ginger suddenly. It was nearly an hour later, and the boat, under the steady pull of Lebon's rowing, was slowly but surely drawing nearer to the green hill that stood out against the blue.

Again and again the convict's black, venomous eyes had sought the two juniors, but found them watchful, on their guard. They were only too well aware that he was watching for a chance to get the upper hand, and they were ready to knock him senseless at the first attempt.

Jim was steering, and he gave the tiller a turn, to keep clear of a low sandbank that lay ahead. Then Ginger suddenly started to his feet, pointing to the sandbank with a startled yell.

Jim Dainty stared. On the bank of sand, that rose hardly three or four feet over the sea, a human figure appeared. It was that of a bearded, haggard, tattered man, who stood shading his eyes with his hand from the sun-glare and staring at the boat. Not a trace of vegetation grew there, and it was startling and amazing to see a human figure on that burning stretch of sand.

Lebon stared for a second, and then twisted his head round to see what they were looking at. At the sight of the tattered figure on the sandbank his eyes blazed.

"Mes camarades!" he ejaculated. And he bent to the oars with redoubled vigour.

The juniors hardly needed Lebon's exclamation to enlighten them. They guessed that the man on the sandbank was one of the ruffian's comrades who had escaped from Devil's Island with him. There was no sign of their boat to be seen, and they wondered whether it was hidden on the other side of the bank.

That that was the case they soon had proof; for the man, after a long stare at them, ran down the bank and disappeared on the farther side. A few moments later a boat emerged into view from behind the bank.

"My hat!" breathed Jim Dainty. There were five men in the boat—tattered, worn, haggard, desperate—evidently the crew

of escaped convicts of which Lebon had been one. And they were hardly a furlong distant; the sandbank had hidden them and their boat from sight till now. Lebon, heedless of heat and fatigue, was rowing madly to reach them. Jim Dainty jammed over the tiller, and swung away.

"We've got to keep clear of that lot!" panted Ginger.

The convicts' boat was already pulling for them—four men at the oars, one steering. Even had they known nothing of that wild crew, their looks would have warned the juniors to keep clear.

In other circumstances, they would gladly have shared what they had with shipwrecked and starving men. But from their experience with Lebon, they knew what to expect from his comrades. That the convicts were in utter and desperate need was clear. With the island hill in sight on the horizon, they had stopped at the sandbank, and it could only have been in the hope of finding there shellfish to satisfy the cravings of hunger, or a pool of water to quench their burning thirst.

"Steer clear!" breathed Ginger. "You bet! Lebon, you scoundrel, pull!" roared Jim fiercely. As he steered away from the approaching boat, Lebon ceased to row, and laid in the oars. He grinned at them savagely.

"My comrades come, garcon—you may count your lives in minutes now."

He started to his feet, grasping one of the oars. Jim and Ginger were on their feet at once.

The case was desperate now. If the convicts' boat reached them, they were lost. That hungry, desperate, savage crew were not likely to spare provisions for prisoners. The shadow of death hung over the Grimslade boat. Life and death were in the balance, and Lebon evidently intended to prevent their flight if he could. It was no time to stand on ceremony, and the two juniors hurled themselves at the ruffian as he swung up the oar.

The boat rocked wildly. There was a wild howl from Fritz Splitz, a shrill squeal from Friday.

The oar in Lebon's desperate hands missed Jim Dainty by a foot as he drove the boathook at the convict. With a yell of pain, as the sharp end jammed on his chest, Lebon went over backwards, crashing down.

Ginger was on him the next second, with a smashing blow from the hatchet. Had the ruffian been on his feet, Ginger would have used the edge without compunction. But Lebon was sprawling in the bottom of the boat, and the red-headed junior of Grimslade used the back of the axe. But it was enough—the crash came down on the convict's tousled head with stunning force, and Lebon gave one faint groan and lay senseless.

There was no time to secure him further—he was, at all events, safe for the moment. Hatchet and boathook were flung down; the juniors seized the oars and jammed them back into the rowlocks. They bent with desperate energy to the pull.

"Mein gootness!" stuttered Fritz Splitz. He left off mopping his fat face, and stared at the convict boat, his saucer-like eyes bulging from his head. "Ve vas all tead mit ourselves before! Ach! How I vish tat I vas pack in Chermany!"

A yell floated over the sea from the convicts' boat astern. It was in fierce pursuit.

With set teeth, the two juniors pulled. At the first glance, it seemed as if they had no chance—two boys pulling against four men in the other boat. But Jim and Ginger were strong and sturdy, and they had had a rest. And the convicts, though of strong and muscular physique, were in no condition for a race. They were worn down with hunger and thirst and exposure, and obviously almost at the end of their tether.

Savagely as they pulled, their failing muscles got little speed out of the boat. The race was not so unequal as it looked. Even as the convicts' boat came surging in desperate pursuit, one of the rowers sagged over in his seat from exhaustion.

"My giddy goloshes! We'll beat them!" breathed Ginger.

"Pull!" breathed Jim.

"Mein gootness! Now ve vas going pack away from tat island!" moaned Fritz Splitz. "I tink tat ve neffer, neffer reach tat peastly island after."

There was no choice in the matter for the Grimsladers. The sandbank that had hidden the convicts from sight lay in their course, and the enemy were directly between them and Castaway Island. There was nothing for it but to turn tail on their longed-for destination and pull out to sea. Later, if they escaped, they could make the island again, but escape from merciless death at the hands of the gang from Devil's Island was the first consideration.

Amid the bubbles that fled astern from the sweeping oars a black fin glanced. The shark was still there, haunting the boat, hungry for prey. The glimmer of that fin from the sea spurred on the schoolboys to desperate efforts. If the pursuing boat overhauled them, the shark would not have to wait long for his prey!

With the sweat rolling down, panting for breath, they put all their beef into that fierce pull. They were holding their own, at least. Behind them came the savage crew of convicts. They had neared while the juniors handled Lebon, but they had not gained since then; an interval of thirty fathoms separated their bows from the stern of the Grimslade boat, and it had not lessened by a foot.

And hard as the work was to the schoolboys, it was harder to the famished, parched crew in the pursuing boat. They pulled twice as many oars, but they had not the beef to put into the pulling. The sun, sinking in the west, flooded the sea with crimson, but the heat was not yet abated. It seemed to the two juniors that they must faint at the oars if they kept on. But they kept on. It was death to give in.

Bump—bump! The Grimslade boat rocked and jarred on some sandy shoal hidden by the blue waters. The keel scraped over the sunken sand, and the boat lost way. Luckily, the water was deep enough over the shoal to prevent them from going aground. But they lost way, and as they desperately pushed off into deeper water, the convicts' boat came up with a sweeping rush.

Crash! came the bows on the starboard gunwale of the Grimslade boat, with a shock that made Jim and Ginger reel, and sent Fritz Splitz rolling over like a barrel on the insensible Lebon.

A hairy, bony hand clawed at the gunwale and held on. The two boats rocked together, and the wild crew came scrambling to the attack. Jim Dainty was on his feet, an oar in his hands. Madly he swung it round, and one of the convicts went staggering back, falling among his comrades.

Ginger shoved with his oar at the same moment, catching a desperate rascal under the chin and hurling him backwards. That same shove sent the two boats rocking apart, and another convict, in the act of leaping, was too late to check himself, and plunged into the sea.

There was a swirl in the water between the boats, the glancing of a black fin. The swimming convict clutched at the boat he had fallen from, and one of his comrades dragged him in just as the jaws snapped behind him. The shark had barely missed.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger.

He drove his oar at the convicts' boat as it surged on, but again a hairy hand clawed and held. Jim Dainty brought down the boathook with terrific force and the convict tore away his hand with a shriek of agony. Again the boats rocked apart.

A yell of fury, fiercer and more blood-curdling than the yell of savages, came from the Devil's Island crew. That there were food and water in the Grimslade boat they had no doubt; they could see that the schoolboys were not famished and parched, like themselves. And for a fragment of food, a drop of water, they were ready to fight like wolves—to add murder to the crimes for which they had been sent to Devil's Island.

Wild beasts would not have been so dangerous as that fearful crew, had they succeeded in boarding the Grimslade boat. It was well for the juniors that the wild crew were worn down with hunger and thirst.

Yelling with rage, the convicts strove to lay aboard the Grimslade boat again; but again the oars drove them off, and a desperate shove at their gunwale sent the two boats shooting away from one another.

It was but a moment's respite, but Jim and Ginger acted swiftly. They jammed their oars into the rowlocks and pulled. There was a splashing of oars as the convicts followed. But two of them had been too hard hit to pull, and only three oars were in the water now. The Grimslade boat drew away.

The Prey of the Shark!

"MY giddy goloshes!" Ginger Rawlinson wiped the streaming perspiration from his brow. "Oh, scissors! A miss is as good as a mile!"

"We've done it!" breathed Jim. The convicts' boat was disappearing. They had given up the hopeless pursuit and turned, to pull wearily for the distant island.

The hilltop of Castaway Island was very far away now, a blur on the sea. Jim and Ginger ceased to pull as soon as they saw the enemy's stern turned towards them. They were utterly spent, aching with heat and fatigue, and felt as if they could hardly stir a limb.

Half-dazed, they sat in the drifting boat, but their eyes were on the motionless figure of Lebon. If he had stirred they would have found energy enough to move.

"We're a good way off the island now, old thing," said Ginger, "and when we try for it again we'd better go a good way round. My giddy goloshes, I don't want to run into that gang again in a hurry!"

"We may get the wind again at sunset," said Jim. "We'll run southward a bit, and make the island on the south side. Oh, look!"

He pointed, and shuddered. A hideous snout showed from the water, hardly a couple of fathoms from the boat. The patient shark was still haunting them.

Jim Dainty rose at last. "Better make sure of that scoundrel," he said, with a nod towards Lebon.

Jim picked up a length of rope and stepped towards the hunched figure in the bows, Ginger following him. To all appearance, Lebon was still unconscious, and the juniors intended to secure him before he recovered his senses. Jim Dainty bent over him, rope in hand, and as he did so the apparently unconscious man came suddenly to life. A sinewy arm was thrown round Jim's neck, throwing him over.

Taken by surprise, the Grimslade junior went over helplessly, and his head crashed on the timbers with a stunning shock. In a split second the convict was on his feet, springing at Ginger, and the red-headed junior had hardly time to grapple with him as he was grasped and borne backwards.

"My giddy goloshes!" panted Ginger. "Oh, you villain! You rotter! Oh!"

He stumbled backwards over a thwart and went down, with the man from Devil's Island over him.

Lebon's eyes blazed with ferocity. In his sinewy clutches the red-headed junior was dragged to the gunwale.

"Help!" yelled Ginger frantically. "Jim! Fritz! Back up! Oh, help!"

Jim Dainty, with spinning brain, strove to rise. He crawled to his knees, pressing his hand to his spinning head. There was a

splash beside the boat as Ginger went into the water; but he was clinging and clutching desperately to the convict, one hand wound in his tousled hair, the other gripping his arm. Lebon, snarling with ferocity, struck at him with a savage clenched fist, fiercely anxious to get rid of him before Jim Dainty could rally and come to his aid.

But Ginger was not so easily got rid of. He clung to the ruffian desperately, heedless of the blows that rained on him. Ginger, with his legs in the water, felt, rather than thought of the haunting shark, and shrieked wildly to Jim.

Jim Dainty was coming. Dazed and dizzy as he was, he staggered towards the convict and grasped at him.

With a snarl Lebon turned on him. For the moment he had to turn from Ginger, and, with the horror of the shark in his mind, one moment was enough for the red-headed junior. A frantic scramble, and he was in the boat again. And hardly a second later there was a dull thud as a snout struck against the timbers.

Jim Dainty was down in the bottom of the boat, the convict on him. Ginger grabbed the iron rowlock from its place and brought it down with a crash on the back of the convict's head.

A fearful yell rang from the man from Devil's Island. He leaped to his feet, staggering in the lurching boat. Before he could recover his balance the lurch of the boat sent him backwards over the gunwale, and he splashed on his back in the water. Head first, he shot into the depths.

Ginger and Jim Dainty, panting for breath, hung on to the boat, which was rocking so wildly that it threatened to capsize. Fritz and the monkey were rolling in the bottom, both of them squealing.

The convict's dark head appeared beside the boat a few moments later. His hand clutched at the gunwale. But it was only for a moment. The next, the fiendish ferocity in his savage face vanished, to be replaced by a look of horror and despair that long haunted the Grimslade juniors.

For the moment they did not understand. Then they caught a gleam of white in the water—the white belly of the shark, turning over to bite. One long and terrible scream rang in their ears, and then the man from Devil's Island vanished from their sight, never to be seen again.

With the fall of night, as Jim Dainty had hoped, came the breeze. Under sail the Grimslade boat ran out to the west, tacking wide to the southward to avoid a possible meeting with the convict crew. It was in the gleaming light of a bright moon that they sighted the island hill again, and in the moonlight they brought the boat round to the southern shore and landed, at long last, on Castaway Island.

"Look, there's a boat making for the bay!" Streaky Bacon called excitedly to his chums on Castaway Island, for he thought the sight of that boat meant that Jim Dainty & Co. had returned, safe and sound, after all.

But there's a big shock in store for the chums on Castaway Island. That boat contains—convicts! Next week's story of the Grimslade Crusoes is the "goods" — don't miss it.

THE FLYING JOCKEY!

(Continued from page 446.)

worry Gordon or Sam Payling. Satan gave him a welcome whinny at sound of the familiar whistle. Then in a few moments the horses for the Chatterton Stakes were cantering down to the starting-gate.

The crowd roared its approval of this sensational arrival; they were yet to learn the story of the mysterious kidnapping via the newspapers, and, by the same token, were destined never to solve the mystery any more than was Gordon or his friends. For the moment, however, all minds were focused on the race.

"They're off!" And Satan had sprung into his stride like the good 'un he was. Gordon, however, kept him on a tight rein, knowing his habit of trying to run himself out in a thoroughbred effort to maintain the lead of his rivals. The course finished on an uphill grade, and it was in the last furlong that the race would be decided. The thunder of the flying hoofs echoed dully to the watching spectators; the cries of the bookmakers began to swell above the anxious murmurings of the crowd.

"I'll lay three to one Satan!" "Satan'll never win it! He's lying third and falling back with every stride. Four to one, Satan!"

"I'll take that in fivers," said Freckles, arriving at a very fortunate time, "or tenners, if you like."

"Ere, make it tenners and I'll lay you five to one," chirruped the over-confident bookie.

The horses had passed the half-way post now—four more furlongs to go. And now, as the uphill gradient began to tell, the horses became strung out. Still Gordon was content to keep Satan lying just behind the leaders; but experienced racegoers could see that he had a heap of reserve energy in hand. Came the six-furlong post, and then Gordon gave Satan a light flick of the whip.

The gallant black responded immediately. Ears thrown back, mouth tugging at the bit, it seemed to glide past its nearest rival, though in another three strides past the horse which had been shouted home as the winner. Another light touch of the whip and Satan pulled out that extra bit of speed and muscle, and flattened the opposition by beating his nearest opponent by three clear lengths.

Old Sam Payling had won his money—so had Freckles!

Jem Macefield, the stable lad, seemed stonily unhappy. Messrs. Beardrell & Co., in their London office, swore things which were unprintable. Their plans had come unstuck. How, they did not know—not until the morning papers gave a full history of Gordon and Freckles' daredevil ride to Newmarket, whereupon they decided to lie low and pay up.

The horse-box came to a standstill, for the simple reason that it had been detached from the rest of the train!

"Gosh!" groaned Sam Payling, gazing about the desolate countryside. "We'll never get Satan to the course in time for the race now!"

There's more trickery afoot to ruin Sam—but once again the tricksters have reckoned without Gordon and Freckles! Big thrills and surprises in next week's grand story.

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