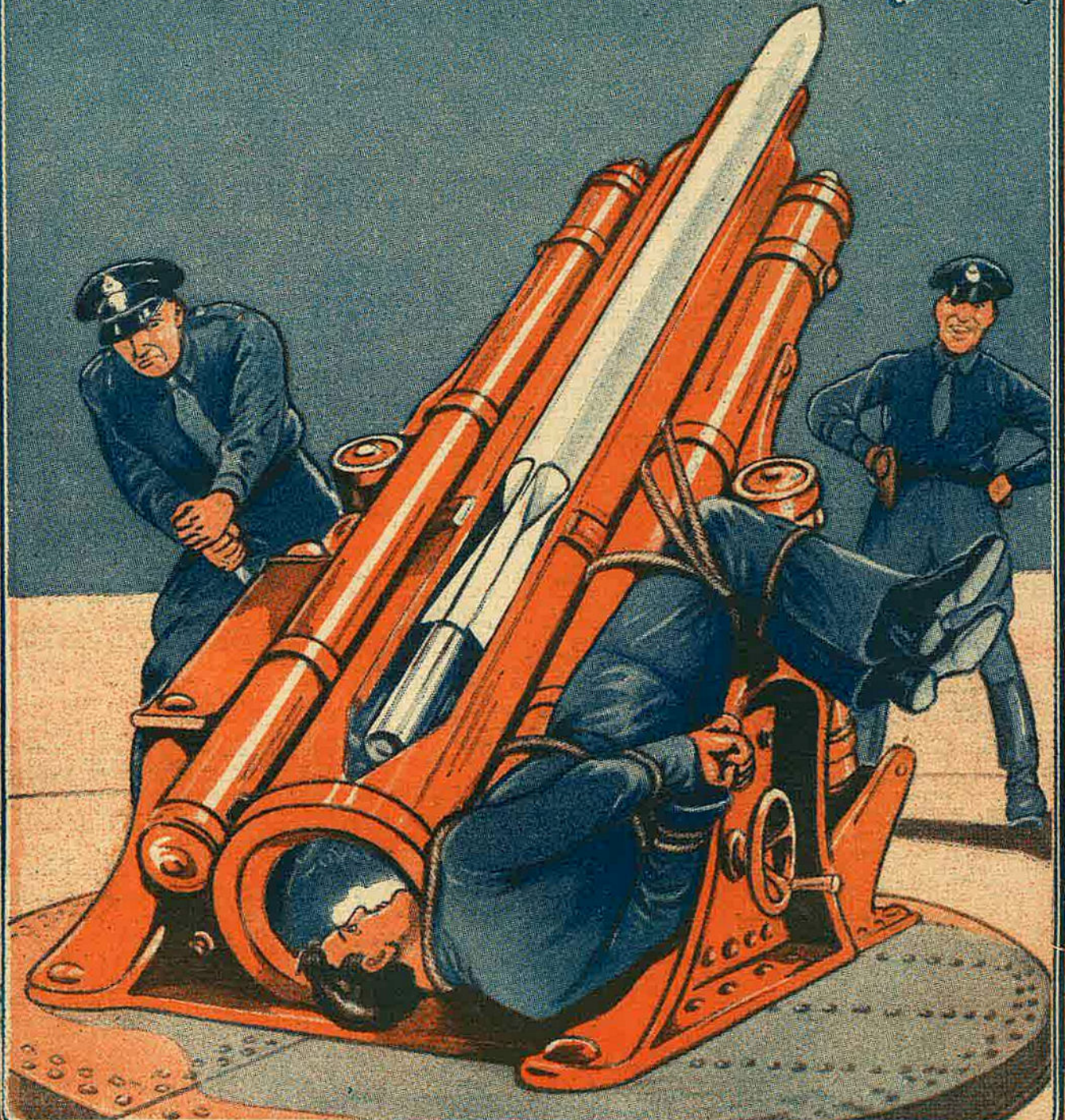


TRIUMPH 2[¢]
Every Tuesday

FAMOUS FOR FIVE THRILLING STORIES INSIDE

TRIUMPH

AND GEM



THE THRILL-STORY OF THE YEAR! READ OF SANDU'S FIGHT AGAINST THE WOLF OF KARISTAN

THE TRAITOR'S SECRET

THE broiling sun of the Himalayas shone down on a thrilling sight.

High above a gorge which twisted tortuously through the mighty barren peaks of the huge mountains, a slender rope stretched from a ledge of rock to a spur on the opposite side.

That rope was all that remained of a rope bridge, and now across it shot Sandu, the boy chief, who was making a desperate attempt to escape from his arch-enemy, Khuba Khan, the Wolf of Karistan.

Sandu was bound hand and foot, and he was crossing the rope by hanging on with his teeth to a pulley.

Danger beset Sandu in front and behind.

In front, coming along the rope towards him was a huge snake, and every revolution of the wheel in the pulley carried Sandu nearer to the deadly reptile, which would be able to kill him with ease, either by crushing him to death in its coils or by burying its poison fangs in him.

But Sandu might never reach the snake. Behind him a rival—a member of his own tribe, but a traitor who, wishing to supplant him as chieftain, was ready to work and help Khuba Khan—was slashing at the rope on which the pulley ran.

Already the rope was fraying. When its last strand parted, the rope would drop and the pulley would run back until it left the rope and Sandu was sent dizzily whirling down into the gorge thousand of feet below.

But Sandu had a knife. Its hilt was in his hands, but at present its blade was wedged between his forearms, where he had placed it for safety when he had rolled from Khuba Khan's camp to this precipice.

Sandu tensed himself. His lithe, brown body twisted as he wriggled his hands, which were bound behind his back until the keen blade of the knife touched the ropes which bound his wrists.

Could he cut himself loose in time? Or would the traitor cut the frail rope first and send him plunging down into the depths of the gorge?

The perspiration rolled from his forehead as he worked quickly. Surely he was doomed! But no—as the razor-sharp edge of his knife touched the cords there came a snapping sound.

The cords began to drop away from him, and suddenly his arms were free.

Shooting his left arm upwards, Sandu grabbed the rope. The terrific strain which he had put on his teeth was eased and the pulley was stopped.

For the moment he was in no danger from the snake, which had still some distance to crawl along the rope to reach him—if it ever dared to leave completely the other side of the gorge.

With a laugh of triumph Sandu stuck the knife in his loincloth and gripped the frail rope with both hands.

Snap!

He was not a moment too soon. The veiled traitor, with a last vicious slash at the rope bridge, had succeeded in cutting through it.

He gave vent to a yell of triumph as rope and Sandu sped downwards into the gorge.

The traitor was as keen on sending Sandu plunging to his death as the arch-soundrel Khuba Khan was.

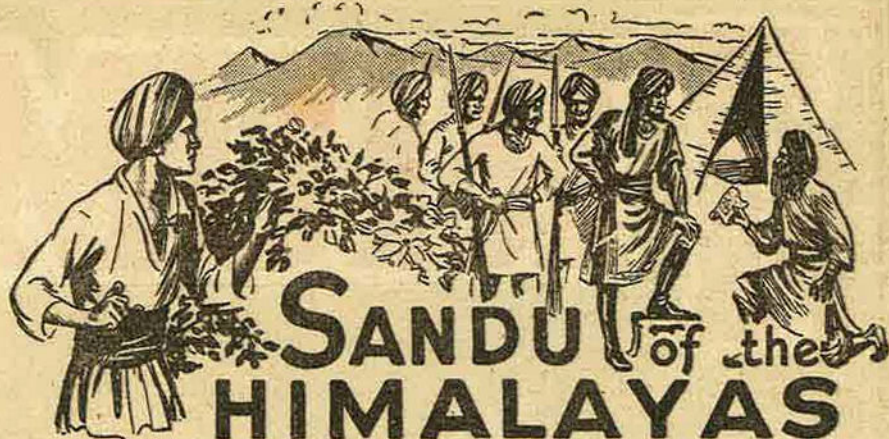
By killing Sandu, he hoped to ingratiate himself with the Wolf of Karistan and gain from him the silver dagger which was the outward sign of chieftainship of Sandu's tribe.

Khuba Khan had stolen that dagger, with its strangely engraved hieroglyphics, and Sandu had vowed that he would recover it.

The sound of the snapping rope echoed like a rifle shot in the narrow confines of the gorge.

Raucous voices echoed the traitor's cry of triumph, as racing down the pass came the black-bearded Wolf of Karistan himself, his ruffianly followers close behind him.

They expected to see Sandu jerked from



his hold and sent hurtling to the jagged rocks and the onrushing torrent several thousands of feet below.

But next moment their cries of triumph were turned to yells of fury, as they saw that Sandu's hands were still gripping the rope, and that he was not rushing down the rope to disaster.

Tenaciously Sandu clung to the rope, but his heart was missing beats as he saw that he was swinging like a pendulum towards the opposite face of the gorge. Would he crash into the cliff with such force as to be knocked unconscious?

Then, inevitably, he would lose his hold and would be dashed to death in the foot of the gorge, probably before he even regained consciousness.

But the end of the rope bridge was made fast to an overhanging point of rock, and instead of being smashed to pulp against the cliff face Sandu found himself swinging backwards and forwards in midair.

He was spinning round like a top, but he twisted his legs around the rope to get a better grip.

Suddenly something hit him with almost enough force to make him release his grip. But it cannoned off him and sped on downwards.

As he glanced after it a gasp of surprise escaped him.

It was the huge snake. Perhaps it had been crushed against the rock when the rope had fallen downwards. At any rate, it must have been surprised into releasing momentarily its hold on the rope, and it had overbalanced from the ledge above, and now it was growing smaller and smaller until it became no larger than a speck, as it sped to certain death.

But the swinging of the rope was lessening, and it was ceasing to spin. Sandu turned his face upwards to the ledge above him. There was safety there now, if he could only climb the rope.

"Shoot him! Shoot him! Don't let him escape, you dogs!"

Blazing with rage, Khuba Khan yelled the order to his men. Not if he could help it would Sandu escape!

Crack, crack crack!

A volley of shots rang out, and Sandu saw pieces of rock chipped off from the cliff face and heard bullets whizzing past him, as they missed him by inches.

But he saw something more—a narrow crevice in the rock.

Sandu set the rope swinging towards it.

With his free hand he gripped the side of the crevice.

It was little more than a yard in width, but that was sufficient for the lithe young Indian. In a few seconds he had wedged himself into it, and then he let the rope swing back.

The rifle-fire ceased, for now Sandu could not be seen by Khuba Khan's ruffians.

Placing the flat of his feet against one wall

of the crevice and his back against the other, Sandu prevented himself from slipping down, and rested.

Thoughts rioted through his brain. Could he remain in hiding until Khuba Khan and his followers tired of waiting for him to reappear?

He glanced downwards. There seemed to be no bottom to the crevice. Possibly it went down right to the bottom of the gorge.

"That I must discover," muttered Sandu. "Nor will I give up yet my endeavour to recover the silver dagger from the Wolf of Karistan."

He began to descend. Placing the flat of his hands against the rock behind him, and cautiously shifting the pressure of hands and feet from time to time, he worked his way very slowly downwards.

It was a journey that taxed his strength to the utmost. One false move would have sent him helplessly slipping and slithering down the crevice.

But Sandu was tough and wiry and determined, and eventually he reached the bottom of the gloomy ravine. He looked up. There was no sign of Khuba Khan's men. They had apparently retired from the ledge where the traitor had cut the rope.

The torrent roared deafeningly through the gorge, and Sandu must cross it before he could climb back to Khuba Khan's camp.

Sharp-edged rocks littered the bed of the river, and he made use of these, passing from one to another until he had crossed the torrent.

Then he gazed up at the frowning mountains that barred his path, searching for a way to climb them.

IN a sun-scorched valley the Wolf of Karistan faced the veiled traitor. Khuba Khan and his ruffians had moved their camp farther into their mountain fastnesses. Now they were in one of their strongest lairs.

Entrance to the valley could only be gained by narrow, tortuous passes which were well-guarded by Khuba Khan's sentries. From the towering peaks that lay on either hand they expected no danger.

No one, they imagined, could climb them. They did not yet realize the skill of Sandu of the Himalayas.

The Wolf of Karistan toyed with the silver dagger. His bloodshot eyes were glittering like a snake's, and his parted lips showed gleaming, fang-like teeth.

"Speak dog, and say why I should not plunge this dagger into your heart!" thundered the Khan.

"Mercy, Great Khan," the traitor pleaded. "Kill me not, and I shall kill Sandu who I know you hate. He does not suspect me. The veil I wear has kept my identity hidden from him. Let me go back to my village. Sandu will return there, and then shall I slay him with poison."

"A cowardly way!" snarled Khuba Khan. "Better far that you proved yourself a warrior

by meeting him with the sword. But I shall ponder until day-break. In the meantime, go to the tent that has been set apart for you, and do not leave this valley until I give my decision."

The sun was sinking over the western mountains, and soon night would fall on the valley.

Of all the fantastic landscapes to be found in the Himalayas, this valley presented an appearance that was grotesque in the extreme.

The towering peaks had been eaten away by wind and weather until they presented a succession of weird, unearthly designs. It was easy to understand how it had come to be called the Valley of Devils.

In the distant past it had housed a race of cave-dwellers, and the entrances to their subterranean dwellings were still to be seen, piercing the walls of the cliffs that rose abruptly from the barren land.

Strange legends were told of the Valley of Devils.

The veiled traitor shivered as the sun went down. It seemed that a chill had descended upon the valley, bringing with it an ominous foreboding of evil. Fit place was this for a bloodthirsty villain such as the Wolf of Karistan.

In the round, felt Mongol tent which had been pitched for him, a smoky lamp of animal fat burned dimly. The traitor started apprehensively as he entered and watched the dancing shadows on the wall of the tent. To his frenzied imagination it seemed that the shadows were alive. He was beginning to regret having thrown in his lot with Khuba Khan.

The Wolf of Karistan was playing a deep game. He was striving to foment trouble between the frontier tribes and the White Raj, ruler of India.

In doing this, Khuba Khan hoped to make himself ruler of the Himalayas.

Suddenly, the traitor stopped dead as he reached the centre of the tent. He tried to shout, but his tongue clove to the top of his dust-dry mouth.

The shadows were alive! One was moving—coming towards him!

A croaking gasp was all that left his lips. Then—thud! A clenched fist caught him squarely on the side of the jaw, and the traitor's legs buckled beneath him as he dropped, a huddled heap, to the ground.

A hand reached down and whipped off the concealing veil. Then there was a hissing intake of breath as the lithe, brown figure straightened up.

"So the traitor who would have murdered me is Iskara, my cousin!" whispered the voice of Sandu.

BEARDING THE WOLF

SANDU stood irresolute, but only for a few moments. Then he ripped off the coverings of Iskara's camp-bed, tore them into strips, and tied up his cousin securely, then gagged him.

Next he slung the traitor into the darkest part of the tent.

"So Khuba Khan will give his decision at daybreak!" he muttered, revealing that he had overheard the conversation that had taken place between Khuba Khan and Iskara.

Iskara had always appeared veiled to Khuba Khan and his cutthroats. That veil was now going to stand Sandu in good stead.

He picked it up and fastened it over his own face, then sat down to wait.

It was not until darkness, punctuated only by the fitful gleam of camp-fires, had settled over the camp that Sandu rose to his feet. He blew out the reeking lamp and peered through the flap of the tent.

The camp was silent as the grave. Here and there he caught sight of a sentry squatting cross-legged on the sandy soil, his rifle across his knee.

Dropping flat on his face, Sandu wormed his way from the tent. Gaunt, ghost-like rocks dotted the valley, throwing deep shadows, and in these shadows he made his way towards the sleeping place of the Wolf.

Not a sound came from Khuba Khan's tent.

In front of it a sentry paced monotonously back and forwards, but Sandu had made for the rear of the tent.

The soil was soft and sandy, and when he reached the tent Sandu dug with his hands like a dog until he had hollowed out a narrow tunnel that would lead under the stretched felt of which the tent was made. Such a tunnel would allow him to pass under the tent walls without shaking them.

Directly he had dug out sufficient soil he flattened himself and slithered his head and shoulders into the tent. A curiously fashioned lantern hung from the roof. Under it an elaborate couch had been placed, piled high with soft, silken cushions.

Khuba Khan was on it, but he was not asleep. He was seated, cross-legged, upon the couch, examining something which he held in his hands. It was the silver dagger. He muttered into his beard as he strove to decipher the hieroglyphics engraved on the blade.

Then suddenly Khuba Khan started, as over his shoulder a hand appeared, and in a flash it seized the dagger. The hand gripped the dagger by the hilt, and turned the point quickly so that it pressed against the breast of the treacherous scoundrel.

But even as Sandu reached for the rug there came a startling interruption from outside the tent.

"Master, the Spirit of the Dead! He comes! He seeks audience with you!" came a yell.

The whole camp seemed suddenly to leap into a turmoil. Sandu heard footsteps running towards the tent, and strident cries echoing down the valley. Then—

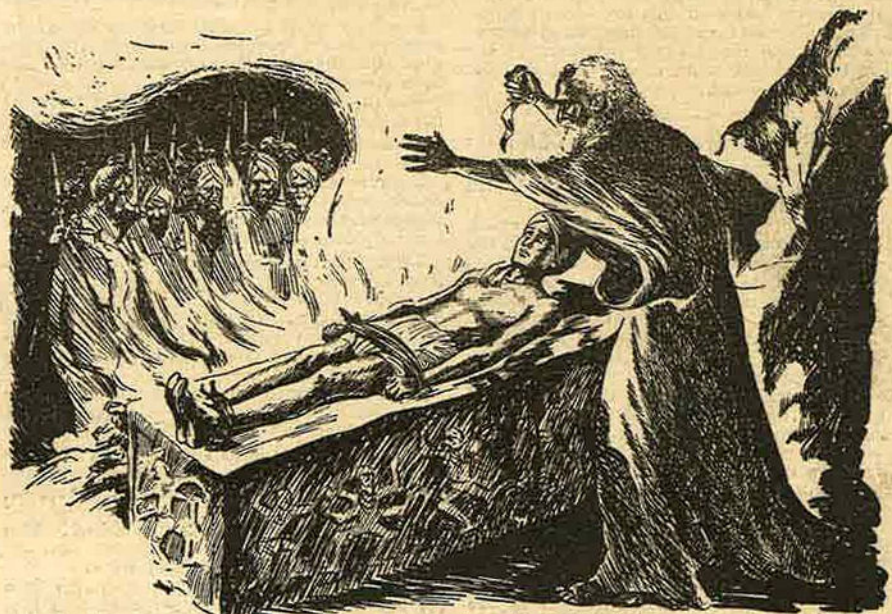
Half a dozen of Khuba Khan's men burst into the tent.

Sandu wheeled. For a moment the followers of the Wolf were petrified with amazement at the sight of their chief being held by the traitor from another tribe whom they all despised, but a deep-throated cry from the bearded lips of Khuba Khan roused them into action:

"Seize the dog! He shall die the death of the thousand tortments!"

Sandu sprang back as the Wolf's men surged forward. One raised an ugly, curved sword, and aimed a smashing blow which Sandu parried with the blade of the silver dagger.

Then the whole crowd fell upon the boy chief, and by sheer weight of numbers bore him to the ground.



As he loomed above Sandu, the Spirit raised his arms high in the air. In one of his hands a serpentine-bladed dagger gleamed and flashed in the firelight. "See how I deal out death to Sandu!" he roared.

"Make no sound, Wolf of Karistan, or the silver dagger will be sheathed in your black heart!" said the voice of Sandu.

Khuba Khan's eyes dilated as he shrank back from the gleaming blade which menaced him.

Then from behind him stole a dark figure. "The traitor!" gasped Khuba Khan, as he stared at the veiled face of Sandu.

Khuba Khan was puzzled. Never had he thought that the craven-hearted traitor would dare such a venture as this.

Sandu laughed low and mockingly. "Get to your feet and face the wall of the tent! Make no resistance, or I shall kill you!"

Khuba Khan rose, backed across the tent, and faced the wall.

Keeping the point of the silver dagger pressed against the ruffian's back, Sandu put out his free hand and unfastened the belt on which hung Khuba Khan's sheathed scimitar.

Sandu threw the weapon upon the couch.

Then he snatched an embroidered covering from the couch. His intention was to throw it over Khuba Khan's head to strangle any cry that the scoundrel might try to give.

Sandu struggled desperately. The silver dagger buried itself deep in the breast of one of the attackers, who rolled over with a strangled cry, blood pouring from a gaping wound.

But against such overwhelming odds Sandu was powerless. His arms were gripped and twisted viciously behind his back until he winced with the pain. The dagger dropped from his grip.

He was hauled roughly to his feet, and stood there breathing heavily as he faced the rage-filled Wolf of Karistan.

"Remove his veil!" thundered the Wolf. "He shall pay with his life for his boldness in threatening me, but I would gaze on his face as he squirms at my feet and pleads for mercy!"

The veil was torn from Sandu's face, and then Khuba Khan's bloodshot eyes almost started out of his head.

"Sandu!" he cried incredulously. "How can that be? Sandu was not the traitor! It was another. What devilry is this?"

"Master, the spirit calls! It grows impatient!"

The cry came from outside the tent.

Khuba Khan hesitated for a moment, then

drew himself up and buckled on his belt and somitar. Then he pointed at Sandu.

"Drag that carrion after me!" he snarled, his lips curling in a cruel smile. "The Spirit of the Dead shall speak his doom!"

He strode from the tent, and Sandu was dragged after him.

Outside Sandu stared down the valley with astounded eyes.

Where one of the ancient cave dwellings ended in a dark, dismal patch on the mountainside a line of brilliant white fire was stretched.

It cast a weird, unearthly light on the faces of the Wolf of Karistan's followers, who were prostrate on their knees, and muttering under their breaths and calling upon Allah to preserve them.

In the mouth of the cave towered a gigantic figure. He was at least six feet six in height.

His face was as dusky as that of Khuba Khan's, but his hair, and a white beard which hung down to his waist, was as white as the snow on the peaks of the Himalayas.

He was dressed in a shapeless white garment that draped him completely, and, as Khuba Khan advanced, he flung up his arm in an imperious gesture which brought dead silence upon the assembled followers of the dreaded Wolf of Karistan.

Sandu gazed in amazement. It was the first time he had seen this mysterious Spirit of the Dead, who could thus command respect even from the bloodthirsty followers of the Wolf of Karistan, and even, it seemed, from Khuba Khan himself.

IN THE MOUNTAIN OF THE DEAD

LIKE the roaring of a mountain torrent the voice of the Spirit of the Dead boomed out.

"Approach, Wolf of Karistan!" it cried. "Give an account of your journeyings and the successes you have achieved!"

Sandu was astounded to see the proud Khuba Khan stride forward and make a deep obeisance.

"Mighty spirit, it is good news I have for you!" he cried. "Soon shall the hated troops of the White Raj be driven from the land of the mountains. Soon shall the banners of thy servant, Khuba Khan, flaunt the breezes from Dibrugarh to Badakhshan. The frontier tribes wait restlessly for my signal to revolt. Only a few think not as I think. One of those tribes belongs to Sandu, and Sandu I have here. He shall die to-night, and another, who will do what I bid, will reign over Sandu's tribe. See, here is Sandu. Speak, mighty spirit, and say what torments he shall undergo ere death releases his tortured soul!"

He pointed to where Sandu stood in the grip of the men who had captured him.

There was silence for some moments, and then the spirit spoke again.

"Bring forward this Sandu!" he ordered. "I would fain see him more clearly."

Sandu was dragged forward until he stood beneath the light of the weird, eerie fire that lit up the mysterious being.

For a while there was silence, but Sandu felt the flashing eyes of the Spirit of the Dead fixed upon him as if they were peering down into his very soul.

"Shall we bury him to the neck in sand, and then smear his face with honey that the ants shall eat out his eyes and tongue, O great spirit?" cried Khuba Khan. "Or shall we tether him to the bent trees that, being released suddenly, shall tear him limb from limb and scatter his accursed remains to the four winds?"

"Neither, Wolf of Karistan!" roared the spirit. "I myself will deal with Sandu. Bind him securely and stretch him upon the altar that lies beneath my sacred cavern!"

In a few moments his commands had been obeyed. Sandu was tied hand and foot with leather thongs that bit into his flesh.

Then he was carried forward to a crude, oblong slab of stone that lay just in front of the line of white fire which guarded the cave of the spirit.

The white fire was dying down now, but its light was still sufficient to allow Sandu to see the curious carved figures on the crude altar

and the ominous stains that covered its smooth surface.

"Build a fire in front of the altar!" came the further command of the spirit.

Quickly a fire was built in front of the mystic altar. Soon the flames from it were leaping up toward the sky. The Spirit of the Dead waved his arm, and the followers of Khuba Khan drew back.

Then, as Sandu strove vainly to loosen the bonds that held him, the spirit advanced slowly towards the altar upon which the Indian boy lay.

As he loomed above Sandu, the spirit raised his arms high in the air, and in one of his hands a serpentine-bladed dagger gleamed and flashed in the firelight. The other hand was tightly clenched.

"See how I deal out death to Sandu!" he roared. "By the power of my magic shall I make him vanish as though he had never existed!"

The serpentine dagger flashed down; but even as the curved blade swept towards the naked breast of Sandu the spirit opened his other hand, and Sandu had a fleeting glimpse of something being hurled over the altar towards the fire.

Next moment everything was blotted from sight, for from the fire arose a blinding cloud of smoke that spread rapidly.

The leaping flames died down as though by magic, and the smouldering embers of the fire glinted redly through the smoke-fog that had been created.

But the dagger had not struck Sandu to the heart!

It had halted barely an inch above his breast!

Because of the concealing bank of smoke Sandu could see little, but he had a hazy vision of the long-bearded face of the spirit looking down into his own.

Then hands gripped him, and he was raised from the altar.

To his utter amazement, he felt himself being carried quickly over the rough ground. Then blackness swept around him, and he knew that he had been carried into the cave of the spirit.

He was dropped to the stone floor. There came the sound of hurrying footsteps retreating from him, and he was left alone.

A few moments later from outside the cave came a long-drawn gasp of amazement, and then the strident yells of the Wolf of Karistan's followers.

"He has gone! Sandu has vanished! This is magic indeed!"

Sandu was as amazed as they were.

Why, instead of plunging the dagger into his heart, had the mystic spirit carried him off in this manner? Had he merely done it to impress the superstitious followers of Khuba Khan?

Then Sandu heard the voice of the spirit again.

"Vengeance is mine! So by my magic arts deal I with those who stand in our way. Get you to your tents. Let no man set foot abroad again until the sun rises over the valley, or he will rouse my anger against him. I have spoken."

Sandu had evidently been carried around a bend in the cave, for no light penetrated into the place where he had been left. He realised that the mystic spirit had worked quickly, dropping him there out of sight, and had then hurried back to the altar before the smoke cloud had cleared away.

Sandu heard the hubbub of voices dying away in the distance as Khuba Khan's men sought their tents. Then footsteps came through the darkness towards him.

Hands felt for him, gripped him, and swung him up as though he was a mere feather-weight.

He felt himself thrown over the shoulders of the mystic spirit, who then carried him farther into the darkness.

Sandu's brain was in a turmoil. Who was this mystic spirit? Why was he carrying him off into the depths of the mountain in this manner? What lay beyond?

Death, perhaps—death a thousand times more horrible and terrifying than any which

even the warped brain of the Wolf of Karistan could conceive!

The dark passages seemed endless.

It amazed Sandu that a white-bearded, seemingly frail being like the Spirit of the Dead should be able to carry him with so little effort along the countless twists and turns of that subterranean maze.

Then ahead of him he saw a flickering light, and a few minutes later the passage ended abruptly, opening out into a larger cave, where the light burned.

In the centre of the cave stood a large white slab of stone. Gourds containing food, which stood upon it, showed it to be used as a table. It was from the table that the light came.

The light came from candles—candles crudely fashioned in the native manner from the fat of mountain sheep and goats. And the candlesticks which held those candles sent a thrill of horror through Sandu's veins.

For they were human skulls!

The guttering candles sent fantastic shadows playing across them, giving them a terrifying appearance of being alive.

But that was not all! Ranged around the walls of that gloomy underground chamber in the heart of the Mountain of the Dead were other skulls—hundreds, nay thousands of them!

The place was one vast charnel house!

The strange being who had carried Sandu here bore him across this eerie chamber.

At a spot where a patch of rock wall showed, just at the dark entrance to another such underground passage, a staple was let into the wall, and from it a length of chain dangled.

The mystic spirit placed Sandu on the floor. Then he wound part of the chain around his waist, fastening it with an old rusted lock.

The strange being crossed to the table, placed the key of the lock upon it, and gathered up some of the gourds containing food. He carried these back to Sandu, placing them down alongside him.

"Eat!" said the Spirit of the Dead in a voice that echoed weirdly round that grim chamber of death.

At the same moment he slashed at Sandu's bonds with a knife. Then he wheeled round and strode back towards the passage by which he had carried Sandu into the chamber.

Sandu's eyes followed him. The ghostly, bearded stranger listened intently. Then he stepped into the darkness and disappeared.

Sandu's brain was working quickly. What lay in store for him?

He had heard strange tales of the mountains and the devils which were reputed to live there. There had been legends of vampires—strange creatures, half human, half animal, who feasted upon human flesh.

Despite himself, a chill crept down his spine. Chained as he was, he felt helpless if more danger suddenly threatened him.

Then he started as he looked at the gourds of food which had been placed alongside him. For in one of them there lay a knife!

But a knife, even though it were sharp-pointed, would be useless to cut through the chain which held him unless—

Another thought flashed through Sandu's brain. Could he loosen the staple which held the chain to the wall?

He wasted no more time. Swiftly he set to work, digging the point of the knife into the rock around the staple.

Bit by bit he dug the staple free, and as he worked he tugged at it, and a thrill ran through him when at last he realised that the staple was becoming loose.

Then, catching the chain in both hands, he tugged with all his might!

But at that same moment there came the sound of footsteps from along the passage that led to Khuba Khan's camp. The Spirit of the Dead was coming back!

Sandu redoubled his efforts. Come what might, he meant to escape.

Can Sandu escape from the Spirit of the Dead? Next Tuesday's chapters will be more exciting than ever. Tell those chums of yours to place a definite order for TRIUMPH with a newsagent, as our paper is in greater demand every week. By the way, there's news coming about your favourite feature that will delight every one of you

"THE ICE-RAY." MAD CAREW VERSUS A FIENDISH INVENTOR WHO FREEZES PILOTS TO DEATH.

MAD CAREW'S DAWN PATROL



FROZEN CORPSES

"PURPLE thunder! What's wrong with you, MacTavish? Have you become moonstruck?"

Mad Carew, the famous flying major of Squadron No. 333 of the British Royal Flying Corps, barked the words sharply across the moon-bathed tarmac.

Framed in the doorway of a near-by hut was the figure of Sandy MacTavish, the squadron's dour Scots sergeant-mechanic, staring up at the moon as if hypnotised by its cold, pale glow.

At Mad Carew's words he turned, saluting smartly.

"Hoots, sorr, but I'm after feeling certain that I've just seen a plane fly across the face of the moon!" he said in puzzled tones.

Mad Carew glared almost eagerly up at a bright, silver moon which seemed to be racing through fleecy clouds.

"A plane?" he echoed, listening intently. "I can't hear anything."

Sandy MacTavish rubbed his bristled chin as again he turned his eyes to the moon.

"Naw, sorr; an' I dinna hear a sound, either," he answered. "It happened that I looked up the noo and saw it as it crossed the moon. I thought at first that maybe it was Captain Hart returning, sorr."

Mad Carew looked swiftly down to conceal the anxiety on his war-scarred face.

"If it is him, then he's run out of petrol, and is coming in on a dead motor!" he barked. "Quick! Get flares out!"

The old Scot hesitated.

"But, sorr, it wasna a Bristol Fighter!" he exclaimed. "Yon was a big plane—maybe a bomber. 'Twas as big as a Handley Page."

"A bomber?" Carew rapped. "Are you sure that you didn't imagine it?"

The Scot shook his head resolutely.

"I didna imagine it, sorr," he answered.

Mad Carew again eyed the moon. It wasn't like Sandy MacTavish to see things that did not exist. And yet the night was so eerily silent and still.

Even the front line guns had ceased their monotonous beat.

If a plane with a dead motor had been circling over the drome they would have heard the swish of the idling propeller.

"Very well! Carry on, MacTavish," the fighting major grunted at last. "And if you see any more bombers with silent engines flying around the moon let me know."

Mad Carew turned away, leaving the Scot still staring skywards.

But the moment he was out of sight of MacTavish the dynamic little air ace dodged into the shadow of a hangar, and for several minutes stood staring upwards, with a look of concern on his shrapnel-scarred face.

Captain Tubby Hart, the squadron's adjutant, was his best pal. Mad Carew hated sentiment like poison, but Tubby was now four hours overdue from a dusk patrol over the German lines.

Unless he had landed at another drome, his petrol tanks would now be as dry as a bone.

When Mad Carew had first heard Sandy MacTavish's words he had hoped that Tubby, having run out of petrol, had managed to get back in a glide; but if that circling plane was a bomber, then it could not be his pal.

But why should a bomber be circling over Drome No. 333 with its engines cut off?

For fully five minutes nothing disturbed the eerie silence of the night, save for the strains of a tinny gramophone from the direction of the Bad Lads' mess hut.

Then, just as Carew was about to abandon his vigil, the headlights of a powerful car swished across the tarmac and came to a stop outside his orderly-room.

Mad Carew stepped forward.

Perhaps Tubby had made a forced landing at another drome and had finished his journey in a borrowed car.

The famous ace was across the tarmac in a few seconds, reaching his orderly-room just after two figures had vanished through the doorway.

He burst in, then stopped dead as he saw that neither of the visitors was his pal.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he snapped.

One of his two visitors was Colonel Jordan, the tall, lean chief of the Special Branch of the Secret Service.

The other, dressed in the uniform of a French flying officer, toyed nervously with the cord of his revolver.

Their haggard expressions and tired eyes proclaimed that they had slept little of late.

"Good-evening!" Colonel Jordan returned. "We have come over to ask your help, Major Carew. Major la Fane and I are up against it."

Mad Carew nodded.

"If it's a flying job, count on me," he answered. "But what's happened to get the Secret Service all washed up?"

Colonel Jordan brushed a hand across his forehead.

"Major la Fane will give you the facts," he said grimly.

Mad Carew indicated chairs, and when all were seated the French officer started.

With many wild gesticulations, and pausing occasionally to mop his perspiring brow, he rattled off a story which caused Mad Carew's eyes to widen with incredulity.

For five minutes he sat as if turned to stone, listening intently, yet hardly able to believe his own ears. It was only when Major la Fane came to the end of his story that he finally spoke.

"Bomber planes disappearing without a

shot being fired at them?" he echoed. "Dead pilots returning frozen stiff at their controls?"

He swung sharply round to face the Secret Service man.

"Do you believe this, Jordan?"

Colonel Jordan's thin lips twitched.

"I took a lot of convincing until I saw for myself that it was true," he answered heavily.

"It was a ghastly sight, Carew. Two French pilots frozen stiff at the controls of a French bomber which had disappeared a week ago over the German lines."

The fighting major stared from one to the other.

"And this has happened at three different French dromes?" he asked distantly.

Major la Fane nodded.

"Oui, monsieur le major. The planes have landed, unseen and unheard, at night-time, not far from our dromes," he answered.

"Each of them had two frozen men in their cockpits."

Mad Carew sprang to his feet.

MacTavish's strange story returned to him in a flash.

"At night—unseen and unheard!" he echoed. "Purple thunder!"

He broke off as the sound of running footsteps on the tarmac outside the orderly-room came to his ears.

The next moment Sandy MacTavish, gasping breathlessly, burst into the room.

At the sight of Carew's visitors he hesitated, then drew up his hand smartly in salute.

"That plane, sorr!" he gasped. "You told me to tell you if I saw it again!"

Mad Carew was at his side in a second.

"You've seen it again, MacTavish?" he rapped.

The Scot gulped heavily.

"No, sorr. But I heard a plane land in the field on the other side of the drome."

"Purple thunder! Come on!" Mad Carew roared, seizing a hand torch from a rack behind the door.

He raced out through the door like a streak of lightning, Colonel Jordan and the French major of his heels, and the breathless MacTavish following behind.

The shell-battered barn—all that remained of a pre-war French farm—was a good half a mile from the tarmac. Mad Carew reached it fully a hundred yards ahead of the others.

Clambering through a hedge bordering upon the flying field, he stared wildly about.

Suddenly his breath caught sharply in his throat.

Fifty yards away, barely discernible against the dark shadows of some battle-scarred trees, was a towering shape—a huge bombing plane.

One glance told Mad Carew that it was not a Handley Page, but a French bomber of such similar design that, in the darkness, it was not surprising that MacTavish had mistaken it for a British plane.

A few seconds later Carew stood in the shadow of the strangely silent machine, playing the bright ray of his torch along the fuselage and then on to the undercarriage, which had buckled up in the soft earth.

The light moved slowly upwards, coming to rest on a motionless figure crouched over the controls in the forward cockpit. The flying helmet and shoulders only were visible.

"Hallo, there! Where're you from?" Mad Carew barked.

His words rang hollowly through the trees, but there was no answer.

With a low grunt, he leapt agilely up on to the lower wing, pulling himself level with the forward cockpit.

Even as he played the light from the torch on to the motionless figure of the pilot the other three pounded up.

"Are they alive, Carew?" Colonel Jordan panted in a tense voice.

The circle of white light was illuminating the helmeted figure's face—a face which glistened like that of a waxwork doll.

Unseeing, glassy eyes gleamed sightlessly back at Mad Carew.

"Mon Dieu!" Major la Fane gasped hoarsely.

"Dead! Frozen stiff!" Mad Carew muttered grimly, reaching out to touch the ice-cold flesh of the young pilot's cheek.

Colonel Jordan and the French officer clambered quickly on to the wing at his side.

"Look! There's another!" Jordan gasped.

Carew turned the torch on to a second still figure in the rear cockpit.

Glassy eyes set in a frigidly frozen face stared back at them, and twisted lips seemed to scream out in silent agony, as if the last words that had been uttered by them had been curses of torment.

Mad Carew heard Major la Fane's sudden intake of breath.

"Do you recognise either of them?" he asked.

The French officer nodded.

"They are both from my squadron—Squadron No. 89," he answered huskily. "They have been reported missing for six days."

Mad Carew turned the light away from the frozen corpses.

"Well, Major Carew, what do you make of it?" Colonel Jordan asked thickly.

Mad Carew grunted.

"What can I make of it?" he snapped. "Dead men can't fly planes. It's impossible to tell how long these unfortunate fellows have been dead, because the ice has preserved their bodies. But one thing is certain—they didn't die on this side of No Man's Land!"

Carew was thinking of his pal, Tubby Hart. Was there any connection between these frozen corpses and his loyal friend's failure to return home from the special mission he had set out upon at dusk the previous evening?

"But, monsieur, I do not understand," the French major said in puzzled tones. "Zese unfortunate officers have been frozen to death inside their cockpits. Is it possible zat there is some hitherto unheard of climatic condition in the sky which results in a pilot being frozen to death when he attains a certain altitude? If zat is not the case, zen how do you explain them sitting in such life-like position in zis plane?"

Colonel Jordan looked hard at Mad Carew.

"Yes, Carew, I get his point," he said. "The pilots could not have been frozen to death before they were put into this plane. Their frozen bodies would have been already set in some other position. Besides, their flying overalls are frozen to the bucket seats."

Mad Carew nodded in grim silence. He climbed to the ground and inspected the giant plane closely.

"And yet there is no ice formation on the wings!" he exclaimed suddenly. "To have frozen those men stiff the outside temperature would have to be low enough to jam up the ailerons and rudder controls. And yet it's only the inside of the plane which bears any sign of frost!"

His eyes wandered towards the bomber's massive landing-wheels, and a low hiss escaped his thinned lips.

Adhering to the semi-inflated tyres was a

considerable quantity of reddish-brown earth. The only red earth on any known aerodrome on the German side of the lines was at Vanda, the big enemy drome which Tubby Hart had gone over to photograph at dusk last evening.

Did this mean that his pal had suffered the same mysterious and ruthless fate that had been meted out to these two hapless French flyers?

Would Tubby Hart return in five or six days' time—a frozen corpse?

MAD CAREW VOWS VENGEANCE

"WHATEVER the explanation may be, Major Carew," Colonel Jordan said, his haggard face lined with anxiety, "something has got to be done about it. That's why we've come over to you. Major la Fane reports that the pilots of every French Escadrille on this sector are becoming unnerved by these uncanny happenings."

"Something will be done about it," Mad Carew's voice had a ring as of cold steel.

He had climbed up on to the wing again, and in the open door of the cockpit was examining the giant plane's frozen pilot.

As he did so he saw a small piece of paste-board secured like a luggage label to the pilot's flying suit.

Mad Carew's eyes narrowed to an angry glare as he saw the words that had been printed neatly in English upon that label in blood-red ink:

DEATH BRINGS YOU
A CHALLENGE, MAD
CAREW—FROM
"ZZ."

Those two capital Z's, printed close together, struck a familiar chord in Mad Carew's brain.

"The Double Z!" he muttered. "That German ace of twelve months ago, Baron von Hauser, always carried a double Z painted on his fuselage. But he's dead—or is he?"

The two visitors were watching the dynamic little flying major closely.

"You have a clue, major?" Colonel Jordan asked eagerly.

Mad Carew's eyes glittered.

"I have more than a clue," he answered grimly. "Either that, or these dead pilots have brought me a challenge from a man I killed in aerial combat twelve months ago."

"But that's impossible!" the French major gasped.

"Of course it is, monsieur," Mad Carew answered. "Therefore, I know who is behind this fiendish devilry. A year ago I shot down the Double Z, Baron von Hauser, in flames behind the German lines. I believed that he went down to his death. It now appears that this wasn't the case, and that he is living today. The fight we started a year ago is to be continued again at once. I am going to Vanda. Double Z has issued a challenge, and I am going to accept it. MacTavish!"

"Sorr!" cried the dour Scots mechanic, stiffening to ramrod attention.

"Service my Bristol Fighter!" Mad Carew rapped. "I shall be ready in half an hour."

"But you're not going alone!" gasped Colonel Jordan.

"I prefer to go alone. It would take my squadron some time to be equipped with ice-resisting clothes. It will not take me so long."

WITH the drone of the Bristol Fighter's 250 h.p. Rolls-Royce Falcon engine, warming up on the near-by tarmac, resounding upon his ears, Mad Carew made his final preparations for the flight from which he knew he would possibly never return alive.

Beneath a loose-fitting flying suit he had donned some strange clothes of his own invention—the result of many hours of painstaking labour and experiments.

He had designed these clothes for high-altitude flying, so that a pilot should be protected from the extreme cold experienced when temperatures as low as 60 degrees below freezing point were encountered high above the clouds.

The clothes consisted of waistcoat, boots, gloves, and helmet, electrically wired together, and connected to a series of powerful dry-cell batteries which he wore around his waist after the manner of a collapsible life-belt.

The whole equipment took up such little space that it could be completely concealed beneath a spacious flying suit, leaving nothing to view that would betray the fact that clothes of an unusual nature were being worn.

"Now I can stand up against anything up to 60 degrees of frost, so long as these cells hold out," he muttered. "And I could perhaps survive 100 degrees below freezing point for a short space of time."

When, a few minutes later, he strutted, with his usual sharp gait, across to the tarmac, he looked a shade plumper than usual; but the difference was so slight that even Sandy MacTavish's gimlet eyes failed to detect it.

Climbing into the cockpit, Mad Carew took the Bristol up into the grey dawn sky in a rocket-like climb.

As he flew over No Man's Land at 10,000 feet he plugged in the electrically heated clothes to the cells around his waist.

Almost instantly, despite the sharp bite of the morning air, a warm glow swept over his dynamic body.

Switching off again, he set his course for Vanda, fifty miles behind the enemy lines, and swept the sky with experienced eyes for enemy aircraft.

His journey was only half-completed when the sun began to peep above the Eastern horizon, bringing a new day to the shell-scarred battlefields of Flanders.

Keeping the Bristol at cloud ceiling, Carew flew on, his hawk-like eyes darting ever from side to side.

Suddenly, when almost within sight of his destination, he espied seven torpedo-shaped Pfalz Scouts, in V formation, streaking across the sky towards him. To his right were nine more planes—black-and-white striped Fokkers—clawing up towards him in three waves of three planes each.

Sixteen enemy planes in all! It would be sheer suicide to attempt to face such overwhelming odds.

But with grimly set lips, Mad Carew pointed the nose of his Bristol straight towards Vanda, and opened his throttle to its widest.

Both formations turned inwards to cut him off.

The speedy Pfalz Scouts were the first to get within effective machine-gun range, as the scissors closed upon the trapped British ace.

Streams of bullets hammered through Carew's wings and fuselage.

The end was near. No plane could live for many minutes in such a withering hail of death.

Mad Carew hesitated. He was about to turn upon the Pfalz Scouts like a cornered tiger, meaning to go down fighting to the very last, when suddenly a red light arced from the cockpit of the foremost black-and-white striped Fokker.

Instantly the pilots of the Pfalz Scouts ceased their murderous fire, and banking sharply, headed away across the sky.

"I see," Mad Carew muttered grimly. "The Fokker pilots have claimed me for their meat, eh? Right! Then it shall be a costly meal for them!"

He flashed steely eyes back over his shoulder to select the first of the enemy planes to attack. A swishing of wings sounded upon his ears.

A Fokker screamed past his side, its pilot signalling menacingly to him to surrender, and pointing earthward.

Then, as the German plane banked steeply away again, Mad Carew's eyes became riveted to its fuselage.

Just behind the pilot's cockpit, in blood-red, was a double Z, followed by a figure "2"!

Every one of the Fokkers bore the "ZZ" brand, each with a different number beside it, the numbers ranging from 2 to 10.

Turning narrowed eyes earthward, Mad Carew saw that he was immediately above the large Vanda aerodrome.

So that was it! They had been sent up to capture him, and wanted to take him alive.

The absence of a "ZZ I" plane told that Baron von Hauser himself had not come up

to meet him, but was waiting somewhere down there on the ground for him.

"O.K. If you want me down there, I'll go!" Carew muttered fiercely. "But not in the way you mean—not yet, anyway!"

He dipped the nose of the Bristol down towards the enemy field. Then he gunned his engine savagely, thrusting open his throttle so widely that his steep descent turned into a screaming power-dive.

On the crowded tarmac of the German drome, pilots and mechanics stared skyward in sudden horror.

Down from out of the sky, straight as a plummet, screamed the Bristol Fighter.

A hundred feet from the ground the fighting major flipped the Bristol on to a wing-tip, side-slipped, and then rolled flat.

Blood-red points of fire frothed from the twin muzzles of his chattering Vickers.

Fully two dozen running figures sprawled flat to the ground and remained motionless—riddled with British lead.

Mad Carew was avenging the loss of his pal!

Up screamed the Bristol, to bank steeply round and then come ripping back.

And then, from the lofty tower of a chateau bordering the aerodrome, came a sudden beam of cold white light—like a daylight search-light.

It seemed to burn a dazzling pathway through the air, joining the chateau to the cockpit of the diving plane.

But it struck Mad Carew like a sudden blast of Arctic wind, so intensely cold that it seemed to tear the flesh from his face as if with needle-sharp claws, and transform his fingers into rigid sticks, devoid of all sense of feeling and touch.

In the nick of time Mad Carew switched on the current of his electrically heated clothes. The warm glow from the wires leading to his waistcoat, boots, gauntlets, and helmet brought tingling life back into his veins just in time to enable him to snatch back the joystick and pull the Bristol up from out of its power-dive.

He had discovered why pilots who flew to the German drome at Vanda never returned alive!

But for his electrically heated garments, he would now have been a frozen corpse!

BARON VON HAUSER

MAD CAREW'S brain worked with vivid clarity.

The deadly Ice-Ray had been switched off, but the black-and-white striped Fokkers were circling overhead, as though ready to pounce upon him if he attempted to make a bolt from out of the ray's reach.

They evidently wanted to give him a chance to land intact, for Mad Carew sensed that had the ice-cold ray been kept focused upon him for long, not even his electrically heated clothes would have saved him from being frozen to death.

But Mad Carew turned down the thought of attempting to make a bid for life, and chose instead a course which common sense warned him was akin to suicide.

He was determined to meet Baron von Hauser face to face, and so he pointed his Bristol Fighter earthward, and brought off a deliberately bumpy landing close to the German tarmac.

As field-grey-clad figures raced towards his plane he switched off the current from the battery inside the concealed belt and allowed his body to slump forward across his controls, his eyes tightly closed.

Despite the heat from his electrically warmed garments, ice had formed, through condensation, upon the outside of his flying overalls.

His breath had turned into glittering icicles upon the fur-collar around his neck, and a glistening hoar-frost was coating his instrument board, joystick, and those parts of his plane which the deadly ray had encountered.

"Jawohl, the pig-dog is as dead as frozen mutton," grunted an unter-offizier. "Did I not say that the Herr Baron, in his fury, had made the strength of the ray too great? Never before have I heard the ray sizzle as

it did when it was being directed upon this verdant Allied plane!"

A German pilot climbed up on to the Bristol's wing and stared closely into Mad Carew's war-bitten face.

"Nein! Nein! He lives!" he said in a guttural growl. "See, the frost melts around his mouth, which proves that he still breathes. Carry him at once to the chateau, where the Herr Baron waits to see him!"

Keeping his body rigid, as if frozen stiff, Mad Carew allowed himself to be lifted down from the cockpit and conveyed across the tarmac to the chateau, keeping his eyes tightly closed.

He felt himself being placed—still in a cramped sitting position—on a hard floor with his back against a wall.

It was no easy matter to keep his body in that cramped position, but he feared that if he moved too soon his captors might suspect the existence of the electrically warmed clothes.

The fierce heat of a fire glowed upon his face.

And then he heard a voice so devoid of life, and yet so utterly evil, that an involuntary shudder ran down his spine.



In a desperate bid for life Mad Carew hurled himself upon the maniac scientist. But the Double Z threw up the hideous prongs of his left arm and two powerful jets of icy vapour shot from the protruding antennae, striking Carew squarely upon the chest.

"Not too close to the fire—the shock of thawing might kill him, and then he would escape my vengeance!" that lifelessly flat voice said. "I want him to come back to life slowly, so that he will suffer to the full the pain that always accompanies frost-bite."

Mad Carew knew that at last he was face to face with the German whom, for twelve months, he had believed to be dead—the Double Z!

He longed to open his eyes, but knew that it would be a fatal mistake to do so yet awhile.

For five long minutes he remained as motionless as a corpse. Then that lifeless voice broke the silence again.

"Now, you may see whether a little massage will bring the English pig back to life!"

In a flash Mad Carew realised that the moment had come for him to show the first symptoms of recovering.

If his captors started to massage him they would undoubtedly discover the electrically heated clothing, and his game would be up with a vengeance.

He gave a realistic hollow groan. He

moved his leg and bared his teeth as if stifling back a shriek of pain.

An inhuman cackle rang in his ears. "Where am I?" Mad Carew muttered thickly. "Merciful heavens—the pain! I can't stand it—I can't!"

He slowly opened his eyes, and the words faded from his lips in a genuine gasp of mingled amazement and repulsive horror.

Standing over him was a huge man dressed in the field-grey uniform of a German squadron-commander.

But the uniform was the only normal or natural thing about the repugnant figure. It seemed to add a grotesque hideousness to the rest of his repulsive being.

His head was covered by a cylindrical mask made out of dark-stained mica which rested on his beast-like shoulders, giving him the appearance of an invader from another planet.

From a narrow slit in the mask gleamed two blood-red eyes, surrounded by yellow, parchment-like skin as devoid of living tissues as the skin of an Egyptian mummy.

Instead of arms protruding from his tunic there were strange-looking sleeves, ending in grotesque steel implements.

Where Baron von Hauser's left hand should

have been there were protruding antennae, like the feelers of a snail.

Instead of a right hand there was a pair of hinged pinchers, milled like a lobster's claw, which at the present moment were grasping an automatic with a special device attached to it, so that the trigger could be operated.

"Yes, shudder, Major Carew!" the Baron von Hauser snarled. "You are looking at your own handiwork."

The evil, toneless voice was muffled by the mica mask.

"I don't understand you!" Mad Carew barked, still writhing in well-assumed agony. "My handiwork—why?"

"This mask hides a face that I shall never disclose to the world again, because of its hideous disfigurement," Baron von Hauser retorted, in an angry voice that echoed hollowly inside the mica mask. "Until one day twelve months ago, my fellow-countrymen looked upon me as a handsome-featured pilot. Then we fought in the air—you and I. You won; I went down in flames. I was dragged from a blazing cockpit, more dead than alive. Skilled scientists and doctors saved my life,

but when I saw my own face in the mirror, I almost wished they had let me die!"

The Double Z's voice grew shrill with fierce anger.

"I shuddered when I saw it, and swore that no other human being should set sight on features so repulsive," he continued. "And so I had this mask made. But although so facially disfigured, I realised that I still had my brain left. I vowed, there and then, that I would use it to wreak a terrible revenge against the verdampter Allies—and especially the one man who had been directly responsible for my disfigurement—you, Major Carew!"

The fighting major's lips curled with mingled pity and contempt for this madman standing before him, for there was no doubt that the Baron von Hauser was a raving madman.

"And has it never occurred to your warped brain," he said bitterly, "that your unhappy fate was the fortune of war? That it was something that all of us who fight in the air must be prepared for?"

"Nein, herr major; death I was prepared for, but not for something a thousand times worse than death!" the Double Z snarled. "For months I lay in hospital nursing an all-consuming hatred for you. My one burning desire was to get you into my clutches, so that I could revenge myself against you to the full."

"Now I have got you! I knew that when you saw the frozen corpses, and when your friend, Captain Hart, failed to return from his attack upon this drome, you would come in search of me. Well, you have found me, and you have found death, too!"

Mad Carew's brain was working vividly. The sentence of death he had just heard left him unmoved—his one thought was to try to think out some way of outwitting this maniac.

"You are still mystified as to how I have sent back frozen corpses in charge of planes to the dromes of the accursed Allies," the Double Z continued. "As you will not live to benefit by the knowledge, I will let you into my secret."

With his repulsive handless arm he made a swift signal to two German pilots standing guard over Mad Carew.

They crossed to the British ace, and dragged him to his feet.

Mad Carew, still play-acting superbly, allowed his legs to drag along the ground as he was carried roughly to a window on one side of the room.

The window overlooked a courtyard at the back of the aerodrome.

Standing wheel to wheel were row upon row of lorries, on each of which was mounted a massive instrument which bore the appearance of a portable searchlight.

"They are my Ice-Ray projectors," the Double Z said gloatingly. "They are all ready to leave for the front line to-night. At dawn to-morrow the ray will be directed across No Man's Land, and every accursed British soldier manning your front line will be transformed into a frozen corpse!"

Mad Carew's breath caught in his throat.

"You have already experienced the power of my Ice-Ray, herr major," Baron von Hauser continued. "The strength of the ray can be varied according to the purpose for which it is required. With its aid I have been able to numb the limbs of every Allied pilot who has flown over this drome, and compel him to make a forced landing. In your case, I was in such a rage, because you had dared to ground-strafe my drome that I directed upon you a stronger ray than I had originally intended. At first I feared that I had overdone it, and that you would crash to your death. You must be able to endure very great cold, herr major."

Mad Carew remained silent. He had the electrically heated garments to thank for being alive now.

"Now I will show you why I wished to bring your pilots down to the ground alive," Von Hauser continued. "Bring the accursed pig-dog along!"

Mad Carew was dragged down a long, stone corridor, and into a room with marble walls

—a room that struck as cold as an iceberg to his face.

Along its four walls were benches laden down with immense electrical instruments and gigantic retorts.

But for the moment Mad Carew had no eyes for anything, excepting two figures, lashed hand and foot by stout leather straps, to chairs in the centre of the room. Their uniforms were stiff with frost, their faces blue with cold.

One was dressed in the horizon-blue uniform of the French Flying Corps; the other in the uniform of an R.F.C. officer.

It was Tubby Hart!

Mad Carew's heart leapt madly.

A tight gag was strapped across his pal's mouth, but the slow, agonising movement of the eyes told him that the friend whom he had mourned for dead was still alive.

The agony in Tubby's eyes seemed to increase ten-fold as they came to rest upon Mad Carew, and Von Hauser chuckled evilly as he saw the mental torture his helpless prisoner was suffering at the realisation that the famous British ace had also fallen into his inhuman clutches.

With a stifled cry of rage, Mad Carew leapt angrily forward, but his escort seized him by the arms and dragged him back.

"No, herr major; you cannot help your friend!" Von Hauser sneered. "He would have been dead by now had you not come to his rescue. I have kept him alive because he has given me much trouble, and I wished to punish him by letting him see that I have you in my power. Now you shall see how your accursed Allied pilots are turned into frozen corpses!"

Crossing to a bench, he picked up a small metal cylinder, which he fastened into a leather pouch inside his flying overalls.

He then connected a nozzle upon it to the end of a heavily insulated metal tube which he extracted from the top end of the sleeve of his left arm.

Slowly he began walking towards his two helpless prisoners. Pausing immediately in front of them, he raised his hateful artificial left arm towards them.

And then abject horror dredged all power of movement from Mad Carew's limbs.

Two thin jets of vapour were emitting in twin high-compression streams from the horn-like antennae which formed the Double Z's substitute for a left hand.

The vapours were striking the French pilot squarely upon the chest and spreading in a bluish cloud all over him.

The hapless French pilot was being frozen stiff in front of Carew's eyes. First the doomed man's eyes grew glassy as the intense cold slowly numbed away all sense of feeling; then his limbs grew ominously rigid as the freezing vapour performed its fell work, until at length he was seated in the chair like a waxwork figure, his lifeless eyes gazing sightlessly up at his assassin.

He was now a frozen corpse. Mad Carew had witnessed the ruthless murder of a French pilot by their maniac captor!

For a moment the air ace feared that the Double Z would next direct the freezing vapour upon Tubby Hart. He nerved himself for a desperate effort to tear himself free from his burly escort's hands.

Perhaps, if luck went with him, he would be able to reach Von Hauser before the revenge-crazed maniac could direct either the deadly antennae or the automatic upon him.

But the Double Z's next action proved that Tubby Hart's life was to be spared—at least, for the time being.

With an inhuman chuckle, the baron turned from the murdered Frenchman and, switching off the deadly vapour streams, faced Mad Carew.

"My demonstration is over, herr major," he said in a jeering, fiendishly inhuman voice. "You see for yourself my subject has been frozen to death in a sitting position. It is a simple matter now to thaw him from that chair and place him into the bucket seat of an Allied plane—his own plane, possibly."

"It is then easy for me to fly his plane at a high altitude across the lines, and vplane down to a landing somewhere close to his own

aerodrome. Another plane follows to pick me up after I have given the lifeless pilot another taste of the freezing vapour to freeze him into his cockpit. The next morning his comrades find that yet another of their planes has returned home, seemingly piloted by a frozen corpse."

A torrent of angry words came to Mad Carew's lips, but he checked them on the point of utterance. He knew that they would be a mere waste of breath.

He had learnt the amazing explanation to the mystery that had so completely baffled Colonel Jordan and Major la Fane, but he saw that against such a fiendish weapon as Von Hauser possessed there would be very little hope of his escaping back to the Allied line with the staggering information he had obtained.

"I intend to keep your friend, Captain Hart, as a second string to my bow," the Double Z continued in the same cold, merciless voice. "Your turn will come first. To-night I shall take you back to Squadron No. 333 flying field in your Bristol Fighter. Just before dawn to-morrow you will be found by your young pilots, a frozen corpse in your cockpit, with a piece of paper crushed up in your icy fingers. Upon it will be written, in a clever forgery of your own handwriting, instructions to your pilots to bomb this aerodrome."

Von Hauser paused to give voice to another evil chuckle.

"Then, at the time my Ice-Rays are being directed across No Man's Land," he continued, "your entire squadron will come here to Vanda, eager to avenge your death. My Ice-Ray will bring them down one by one. Then, Herr Carew—and not till then—will my vengeance against you be complete. I shall punish you for all I have suffered during the past twelve months by completely wiping out your entire squadron!"

MAD CAREW'S TURN

"PURPLE thunder, Tubby, if only we could do something!"

Mad Carew uttered the words in tones of hollow exasperation bordering upon despair for the twentieth time during the past long, slow-dragging hours.

Throughout the whole of the day their fiendish captor had added to their mental torture by keeping them locked up together in a grimy dungeon beneath the chateau. They had been left entirely alone and without food behind a prison door that was made of solid iron.

They had examined every inch of their evil-smelling prison, to discover that without aid there was not the slightest hope of escape.

And there was not the slightest hope or chance of any aid coming to them from any quarter.

Bitterly Mad Carew remembered that he had told Colonel Jordan to take no steps for twenty-four hours, and by the time that twenty-four hours had elapsed, he and the whole of Squadron No. 333 would be far beyond reach of human aid.

"I suppose I was a fool to come here alone," Carew muttered thickly, "though at the time it seemed the wisest course. But if I'd brought the whole squadron, that fiendish Ice-Ray would have wiped them clean out!"

And then, with gritted teeth, he thought of the fleet of lorries laden with Ice-Ray searchlights at the back of the chateau, waiting to set out for the front line just before dawn.

He alone knew of the frozen death that was awaiting the entire garrison of the British front line trenches—and he was powerless to raise a finger to warn them of their peril!

The hours of the night dragged by.

"They'll be coming for me soon, Tubby," Mad Carew said quietly. "When they do we must try to fight our way out. Perhaps one of us can escape and kill Von Hauser. Without him to lead them, the Huns might abandon their fiendish plans!"

Another hour dragged slowly by. Mad Carew estimated that it must now be within two hours of dawn.

Suddenly a key grated harshly in the lock

of their prison door. Pressing themselves flat to the wall, one to each side of the door, the two Britishers waited with baited breath.

The door opened slowly, and a beam of strong light opened up across the floor.

They bounded swiftly forward—only to find themselves running headlong on to a wall of bayonet-points.

Their guard was leaving nothing to chance. A dozen square-headed Huns were barring their path.

Only by pulling themselves up dead were they able to save themselves from running straight on to the murderous bayonets.

"Back, pig-dogs," snarled the unter-offizier, "or you die! The Herr Baron wishes to see the swinehund Major Carew!"

Carew's escort marched him out into the open, and took him along the side of the courtyard where the vast fleet of lorries had been paraded.

Lights were moving about everywhere; from the gabble of guttural voices, Mad Carew gathered that the drivers and the experts trained to manipulate the deadly Ice-Ray projectors were making final preparations before setting off towards the front line.

Mad Carew fumed inwardly. Was there nothing he could do to avert this impending catastrophe for the Allies?

Now he was being marched past the tall tower from the summit of which the powerful Ice-Ray searchlight had been directed upon his Bristol Fighter.

The door leading into the tower was standing wide open.

A sudden desperate plan flashed into Carew's alert brain.

He deliberately faltered in his stride, and then stumbled forward on to one knee.

"I—feel—ill," he stammered hoarsely.

The guard stooped over him.

"Get up, dog!" snarled the unter-offizier. "You will have cause to feel ill in a few minutes!"

He aimed a brutal kick at Mad Carew's ribs. But that heavy field-boot never reached its mark.

Mad Carew had only feigned illness to throw the escort off their guard. His hand shot suddenly forward and closed upon the Hun's foot.

The next moment, with a lightning ju-jitsu throw, Carew hurled the burly German clean over his head, to cannon heavily into three of the escort.

A piercing scream rang from the German's lips as the point of a bayonet plunged into his ribs.

With a lightning sweep of one leg, Mad Carew kicked another Hun's legs from beneath him. A burly German leapt at him from behind as he started to scramble to his feet.

Like greased lightning Carew's hands swept up to each side of his head. His fingers closed in a vice-like grip around the back of the German's neck.

Ducking sharply forward, he hurled the big-limbed German bodily over his shoulder with a force that snapped his neck like a matchstick.

One man against a dozen—but they could not hold Mad Carew.

Another closed with him—only to at once be given the half-nelson, and sent hurtling into his comrades' midst with a force that bowled three of them over like ninepins.

Then the dynamic little air ace, as elusive as an eel, darted swiftly through the midst of the remainder, and leapt through the open door of the lofty tower.

Turning like lightning, he slammed the heavy door in the face of his pursuers, and shot home its huge bolts.

With the baffled Huns hammering upon the door with their rifle-butts, Mad Carew raced up a spiral staircase as fast as his legs would carry him.

The shrill scream of a siren echoed in his ears. It was the warning that a prisoner had escaped.

Ere its deafening note had died away, Mad Carew reached the top of the tower.

Hurling open a door, he found himself inside an elaborately fitted laboratory, similar to the one in which he had been brought face to face

with the maniac Double Z, excepting that in the centre of this room was a gigantic wheel attached to a stout shaft which led up through the roof.

The roof was of stout glass, and through it Mad Carew saw the massive projector, its gigantic lens pointing skywards.

Knowing that there was little time to waste, Mad Carew took swift stock of the murder-dealing instrument.

Attached to the spokes of the giant wheel was a small lever, on a crescent-shaped metal disk, which was marked off in degrees.

At the moment the point of the lever rested upon a German word which, translated into English, read: "Off."

"But how the blue blazes is the confounded thing sighted?" Mad Carew muttered fiercely.

And then he saw that the centre of the giant wheel was made of glass.

Peering up into it he realised that it was a gigantic periscope, with cross-hairs bisecting its range-finder into quarters.

He grasped the giant wheel, and found that he could move it in any direction; as he pressed it up away from him the lens of the giant projector were tilted downwards.

He swung the wheel round and pressed it sharply upward. Into the range-finder swept first of all one corner of the chateau, and then the crowded courtyard below.

A fierce gasp of triumph came from his lips as across the sweeping "eye" of the periscope appeared a row of lorries with the deadly projectors mounted upon them.

With a savage hiss he seized the lever and swung it as far as it would go across the face of the dial.

A fierce crackling sound filled the air.

Through the eye of the periscope Mad Carew saw a group of men clustered among the lorries topple stiffly to the ground like felled trees.

Setting his jaws grimly, he began sweeping

the deadly Ice-Ray backwards and forwards across the crowded courtyard.

Death came so quickly to the Germans manning those lorries that they were frozen corpses long before any of them could escape from out of the ray's icy reach.

But Mad Carew's heart was utterly devoid of pity. These men, had they lived, would have shown no mercy to the British Tommies whom they had been ordered to annihilate.

Suddenly Mad Carew heard a door open at his back, and an angry cry sounded in his ears.

Swinging on his heel, he saw the Double Z striding across the room towards him, his blood-red eyes blazing incarnate rage through the slit in his hideous mica head-mask.

In a desperate bid for life, Mad Carew hurled himself at the maniac scientist.

But when he was still five yards short of him, the Double Z threw up the hideous prongs of his left arm, and powerful jets of icy vapour shot from the protruding antennae and struck Carew squarely on the chest.

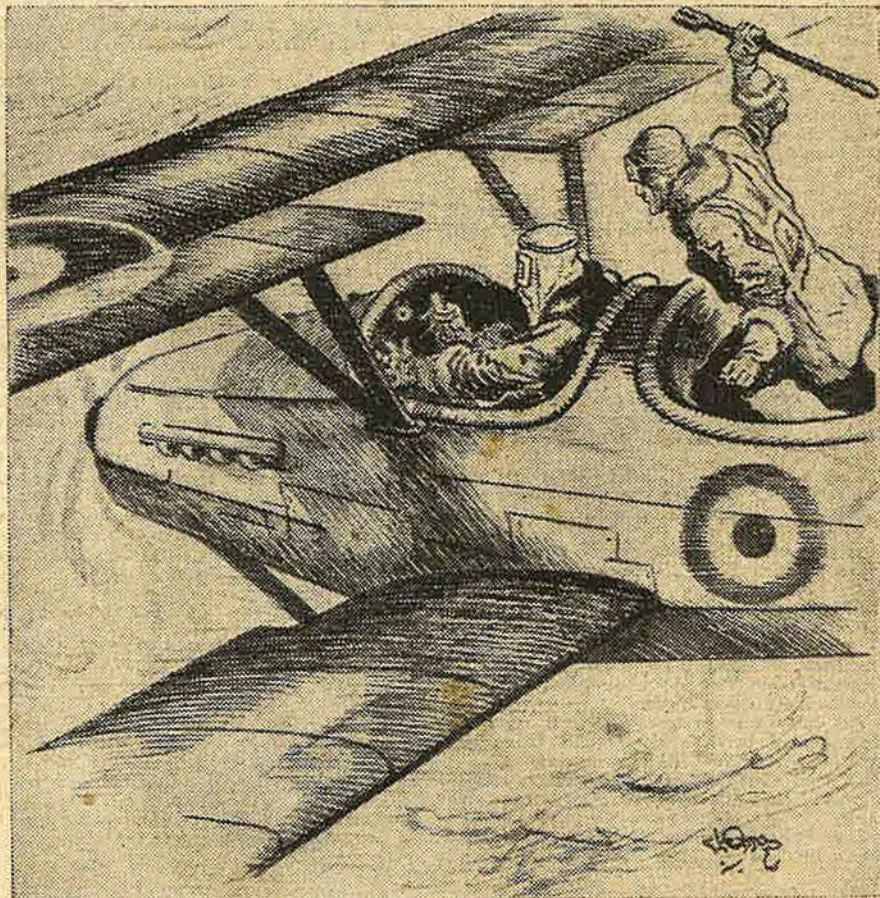
In the nick of time the fighting major switched on the current of his electrically heated clothes.

Had he not done so, the next second would have found him pitching stiffly to the floor, a frozen corpse.

But even the warmth from the cells around his waist was insufficient to combat the perishing cold of the freezing vapour.

He felt his limbs growing numbed with the intense cold. It drained every atom of strength from his body. His outer clothes had swiftly become frozen stiff upon him. He allowed his knees to sag forward beneath the weight of his body.

But even as he slumped heavily to the floor, darkness closed in upon him, and he remembered no more. The freezing vapour had robbed him of consciousness.



For a moment Mad Carew remained as motionless as a statue, the stout joystick poised above his head. Then, taking careful aim, he brought it crashing down on the top of Double Z's hideous mask.

REVENGE

SLOWLY Mad Carew opened his eyes again.

Despite the fact that his head was splitting with pain, he realised that he was inside the cockpit of a plane that was volplaning, with engine cut off, through the moonlit sky.

Slowly the truth dawned upon him. His electrically heated clothing had saved him from death.

But the deadly vapour had frozen his flying suit stiff, and the Baron von Hauser had been tricked into believing that he was a frozen corpse.

Rising slowly in his seat, Carew discovered that he was in the back cockpit of his own Bristol Fighter.

The Double Z was piloting the British plane, manipulating the joystick with his claw-like right hand.

Mad Carew could see the domed top of his hideous mica mask protruding above the headrest of the front cockpit.

Suddenly the flying major became aware that there was a crumpled piece of paper crushed in the stiffly frozen fingers of his gauntlet.

Holding it up into the moonlight, he was able to see that it was a note addressed to the Bad Lads in a fiendishly clever imitation of his own handwriting. It read:

"The fiends have got me, and I am done for. Tubby Hart still lives. If you want to rescue him you must launch a squadron attack upon the German drome at Vanda without a moment's delay. Tubby is doomed to die shortly after dawn, and only a lightning raid can save him.
CAREW."

"Purple thunder, it's a perfect imitation of my own handwriting!" Mad Carew muttered fiercely. "But the trick won't work now, as this madman will find out when he lands this plane!"

The swishing of the wind through flying wires and struts told Mad Carew that they were even now gliding gradually down towards Squadron No. 333 flying field.

A sudden thought flashed to his brain. Throughout the time he had been unconscious the electricity from the cells around his waist had been heating his clothes, saving him from death.

But he could now feel a chill creeping over his body. The cells were becoming spent; in a few moments they would be too empty to generate any further heat.

Upon landing, the Double Z would only have to direct the freezing vapour on to him, and he would be swiftly frozen to death!

"Then I've got to act before we land!" Mad Carew muttered grimly.

He threw a swift glance back over his shoulder.

In the darkness behind them he saw a black winged shape; it was the escorting German plane that was to land and pick up the Double Z.

With a hiss of relief, Mad Carew saw that it was too far away for its pilot to see anything that happened aboard the Bristol Fighter.

Grim-jawed, the flying major removed the spare joystick from its dual-control socket, and, slipping loose his safety-belt, rose stealthily to his feet.

For a moment he remained as motionless as a statue, the stout joystick poised above his head. Then, taking careful aim, he brought it crashing down on the top of the Double Z's hideous mask.

The mica was so strong that it no more than dented beneath the terrific blow, but such fierce force had Mad Carew put into that blow that the maniac scientist sank limply forward across his controls in an unconscious heap.

The Bristol Fighter lurched madly. It began to slide over into a deadly falling-leaf spin.

With frantically working fingers, Mad Carew fitted the joystick into its socket, and, switching on the dual-control ignition, roared the engine into life.

There were lights on Squadron No. 333

tarmac, where the Bad Lads were preparing for their routine dawn patrol.

These lights, spun madly beneath Mad Carew as the Bristol Fighter, twirling round and round, raced earthward.

But, finally through skilled pilotship, he succeeded in checking the deadly spin and bringing the plane's nose up.

As he circled the drome, brilliant landing lights were switched on, bathing the flying field in a yellow glow.

Sandy Mactavish had recognised the tune of the Bristol's roaring engine, and, believing that Mad Carew was making a long-overdue return, had ordered the landing lights to be switched on.

A fierce smile flashed across Mad Carew's compressed lips.

If he landed, the following German plane would return home to report that Baron von Hauser had been captured, and probably Tubby Hart would be put to death as an act of retaliation.

But Mad Carew had formed a swift plan which made landing unnecessary.

Taking the forged message, he swiftly tore off the top line of the cleverly imitated handwriting. The note now began.

"Tubby Hart still lives . . ."

"They've recognised my plane, and they'll think that's my writing!" Mad Carew muttered, with a grim smile. "That's all I want!"

He swiftly rolled the note into a message container, and then, swooping low over the floodlit tarmac, hurled it over the side of his cockpit.

As soon as he saw the fluttering ribbons streaming in the air he banked the plane sharply round into the darkness over the hangar's roofs.

Then, rising to his feet, he removed the mica mask from the Double Z's lifeless head, and, reaching forward, unfastened the safety-belt from around the ruthless German's waist.

The next time that he flew across Squadron No. 333's flying field he kicked the Bristol over into a slow roll. A limp figure slid from the cockpit, and, turning slowly over and over, hurtled away through space.

Baron von Hauser would never again leave an Allied plane behind the British lines with a frozen corpse at its controls!

The Bad Lads would find his mangled remains in the centre of their flying field, and, reading the note their commandant had dropped to them, would swiftly put two and two together.

And the result would cause them to set out with the least possible delay for the German drome at Vanda, with machine-guns and bomb-racks fully loaded.

Again and again Mad Carew chuckled softly as he flew on a straight course back to Vanda.

Just before he brought the plane down to a neat three-point landing, he drew the hideous mica mask down over his head.

The escorting plane came down from out of the darkness in his wake. Its pilot crossed the tarmac towards him as he clambered down from the Bristol's cockpit.

"Herr baron, what went wrong?" the German asked. "You did not land, as we arranged."

"I know that, don't I, fool?" Mad Carew snapped in German, in a realistic imitation of the Double Z's toneless and brutal voice.

"I am lucky to get back alive! The verdamnter British pig-dog came back to life and tried to attack me. I only saved myself by rolling the plane, and sending him hurtling to his death. But his accursed friend shall pay for this! Fetch the other pig-dog Englishman from his cell, and bring him to me in the projector-room of the tower. And bring me, too, a case of dynamite."

"Dynamite, herr baron?"

"Are you deaf, fool?" Mad Carew snarled. "Ja, I said dynamite! Have you any further questions?"

"Nein, herr baron, I go at once!" the startled pilot replied.

With the mask serving as a perfect disguise in the darkness, Mad Carew made his way to the tower.

A few minutes later marching feet resounded upon its spiral stone staircase, and Tubby Hart was brought into the projector-room in the charge of a strong escort.

"All right, leave him with me. I am not afraid of the pig-dog Englishman!" Mad Carew snarled. "And see that I am not disturbed. Instruct everybody in the drome to stand by on the tarmac, ready to repel an air-raid by the accursed British Squadron No. 333!"

Tubby Hart glared at the masked figure like a tiger at bay as the door closed behind his escort.

Suddenly gritting his teeth, he hurled himself forward in a rage-maddened charge, not caring whether he lived or died.

"Steady, Tubby!" Mad Carew cried, in English. "Don't get rough!"

Tubby Hart pulled up dead.

"Major, is it you?" he gasped hoarsely.

"Yes, Tubby," Mad Carew replied, with a low laugh. "Our mutual friend, Double Z, is no more. And now to get busy. We've a lot to do before dawn."

Dawn was just greying the eastern horizon, when the deep note of a gong echoed sonorously through the flying field.

Instantly the tarmac on the flying field below became a hive of activity. That gong was the warning that the Bad Lads were approaching.

"And now to give these rats a taste of their own fiendish medicine!" Mad Carew snapped fiercely.

Gripping the wheel of the deadly projector, he directed its murderous lens down towards the busy tarmac.

Through the periscope he saw pilots clambering into the cockpits of their black and white Fokkers, and mechanics swarming everywhere.

Then, setting his jaws grimly, he pressed over the fateful lever as far as it would go.

When three minutes later Mad Carew, no longer wearing the mask, and Tubby Hart descended from the chateau's tower, there was no sign of life anywhere.

The few Germans who had escaped the deadly Ice-Ray had bolted for their lives.

As they entered their Bristol Fighter and took-off steeply from the field of death, Carew and Tubby heard the drone of the approaching Squadron No. 333, on vengeance bent.

And then as they soared towards the greying dawn sky, a shattering, ear-splitting explosion rent the air at their backs.

Turning their eyes earthward, the two air pals saw the tall tower collapsing earthward like a broken child's toy, enveloped in a blinding sheet of flame.

The dynamite that Mad Carew had planted in the projector-room had done its work. The Ice-Ray searchlight would never bring another Allied plane down from out of the sky, with its pilot a frozen corpse at its controls.

Then the Bad Lads swooped, and, although they could find nothing to attack with their machine-guns, their bombs did devastating work.

When at last Mad Carew gave the signal to return home, the hangars and the chateau had been transformed into a blazing heap of useless wreckage.

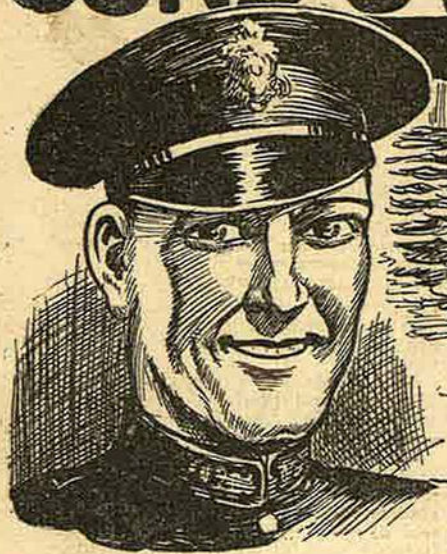
And in the vast courtyards were hundreds of lorries, with the deadly portable Ice-Ray projectors, burning furiously around gaping bomb craters.

"That's the last of Double Z's Ice-Rays, Tubby," Mad Carew said grimly. "We adopted drastic methods to blot it out of existence, but the only way to cure the Huns of frightfulness is to give back frightfulness in exchange. Those poor devils of the French Flying Corps who were frozen to death have been avenged!"

Another magnificent six-page story of Mad Carew next Tuesday. Tell those chums of yours to place a definite order for TRIUMPH with a newsagent, as our paper is in greater demand every week. By the way, there's news coming about this feature that will delight every one of you.

DO YOU LIKE FAST ACTION AND THRILLS? THEN THIS IS THE YARN FOR YOU

GUNS OVER THE RIVER



A Jack Murray, River-Cop, Adventure

THE SINISTER WAREHOUSE

"**J**OVE, Ken, I don't like the tone of those German voices coming from that warehouse across there!" Jack Murray, ace river cop, pointed across the dark Thames to the silhouette of the building. "They're Gestapo or S.S. men, I'm certain."

Ken Sharpe, his assistant, stared in the same direction.

"Shucks!" he ejaculated. "They're Nazis all right! What the heck are they up to?"

"I don't know. But I'm darned soon going to find out! Come on!"

A touch of the cop's foot sent the police launch roaring towards the building.

The cops would never have heard the Nazi voices but for a special gadget they used when on night work. Its secret was a special microphone which amplified conversation or any other sounds up to half a mile away, so that they could be clearly heard through light-weight headphones.

The instrument had a telescopic sighting device. Only sounds from objects seen through the telescopes, or in line with the sights, could be heard. Everything else was cut out.

Jack cut down the launch's engine. A moment later he switched it off altogether. Silent as a phantom, the police launch drifted into the shadow of the giant warehouse. They could still hear the guttural German voices through the headphones.

Jack squared his jaw as the launch came to a silent stop. He had no illusions as to the ruthless men who were in that building.

"Come on, Ken!" he whispered. "We've got to find out what they're up to. Then we'll give the station the wire and get the boys down here in force and round 'em up quick!"

The pals crept ashore.

"Reckon they're on the top floor!" grunted Ken. "That's where the voices came from!"

"Um!" grunted Jack. "Where's a window we can get in?"

The pals soon forced an entrance, and tipped into the blackness.

For a brief instant Jack flashed on his torch. They were in a provision store-room. Great packing-cases were piled up almost to the ceiling.

"Come on!" whispered Jack again.

Hardly daring to breathe, the cops made their way across the store-room. At last they found the staircase.

One false step and they knew what to expect. A fusillade of bullets! If they were caught they would never live to take back the story of what was going on.

Silently they crept up the first flight, then

round a landing and up the next, until at last they reached the top floor.

"They're on the roof now!" whispered Ken again. "What the heck are they doing up there?"

A quick flash of Jack's torch showed him a ladder leading up to a trapdoor. Silently the cop made his way to it and crept up. He put his hand against a trapdoor and pushed, and peered through the opening.

A gasp escaped him. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. There, standing on the roof, round what seemed like a small anti-aircraft gun, were fully a dozen jackbooted Storm Troopers.

In the light of a screened electric bulb Jack made out a black-uniformed man sitting behind the gun. He was manipulating a complicated set of switches and dials.

At his side was stacked scores of thin shells about a yard long and about four inches wide.

Jack saw that what he had first thought to be the barrel of the gun was one of the shells. It was just resting in position in a sort of cradle.

Then in a flash he realised that they were not shells. They were rockets! At the tails of the missiles were three triangular fins. Between these was a device like the silencer on the exhaust-pipe of a car.

Obviously this was meant to stifle the flame. There was a heavy metal plate on the roof to take the blast. But the flame would probably be only momentary. The missile would be practically invisible from the ground when fired.

In addition, German scientists had no doubt perfected them so that they were practically silent.

There was a big bulge about half-way down the rockets. It looked to Jack like rubber. Probably a float, so that they would not go under the surface if they landed on water.

Where had these men come from? Were they some of Hitler's Blitzkrieg men dropped from aeroplanes? And what was their devilish purpose?

The leader of the Nazis walked over and spoke to the man at the rocket-gun.

He spoke in German, but Jack's knowledge of the guttural tongue of the Fatherland was sufficient for him to understand what was being said. It was highly technical—about ranges and trajectories.

"When is the U-boat due off the North Foreland?" questioned the gunner suddenly.

"Just about three hours' time," replied the leader. "Got the latitude and longitude correct? We've got to land the rocket within a couple of hundred yards of her."

"Oh, we can do that easily!" replied the other. "The Hjalmar rocket is as accurate as

a shell! No flame, except for a second, and completely noiseless!"

"Hjalmar was a genius to invent such a contrivance!" ejaculated the leader. "Well, that rocket is loaded with the names and description of all the cargo-boats going down the Thames in the next twenty-four hours. Even though the British keep the times of sailing a dead secret until practically the last moment, it'll be a surprise to me if our U-boats don't torpedo a few of 'em!"

He went back to the subject of range. But Jack had heard enough! Instant action was vital! The alarm must be given without a second's delay!

There were probably a dozen special constables within calling distance. The place must be surrounded before the Nazis could be alarmed!

Jack stepped backwards. But he was not to get away unscathed. One of the Nazis chanced to glance back towards the trapdoor, and he saw Jack instantly.

Crash! The heavy trapdoor bashed home with a bang loud enough to be heard on the other side of the river.

So quickly did it drop that it caught Jack a heavy blow on the side of the head. He grabbed wildly for the ladder. His fingers missed it by inches, and he fell backwards.

"Stand clear, Ken!" he hissed as he spun through the air.

Thud! He expected to hit something hard and be completely knocked out. Instead, he felt himself caught round the shoulders.

"Steady on!" grunted Ken.

Many times he had saved a man from a nasty fall in the gym by acting first and thinking afterwards, but this was the first time he had done it in pitch darkness.

Jack had no time to thank his pal. Even through the heavy trapdoor he heard the Nazis racing across the roof.

"Not a second to lose!" spat Jack. "Down the stairs like blazes! There's half Himmler's secret police up there, getting ready to fire rockets full of shipping information to Nazi U-boats! If they catch us we're as good as dead!"

The pals tore to the staircase. By the time they had got to the top of it the Germans had got the trapdoor open and were piling through, screaming blue murder.

Zip, zip, zip! Ping, ping, ping!

Bullets from a silenced pistol screamed after the pals, but they got down the first flight and were at the top of the second when Jack grabbed his pal's sleeve frantically.

"There's some more coming up from below!" he hissed.

True enough, the sound of climbing feet came from the stairs below them. Probably

the Nazis had a phone line from basement to roof, and had phoned down a warning.

"What shall we do?" cried Ken.
For a couple of seconds Jack stood stock-still. Then—

"Quick!" he whispered. "Into one of these packing-cases! There's some empty ones somewhere on this floor, I know. I flashed my torch on 'em as we came up."

The pals searched for an empty packing-case. They found one just as the Nazis were about to enter the room.

"Quick—inside!" hissed Jack.
Ken climbed into the packing-case, and Jack sprang in after him as the Nazis thundered down into the room, seizing the lid by the projecting ribs which held it together.

As he lugged it in place the blinding beams of the Nazis' torches swept round the walls. A few moments later those from below piled up the last few steps.

Through a chink in the wooden box Jack saw that there were now about twenty of them. Their harsh voices grated out as they questioned one another. It did not take them long to arrive at the most feasible explanation. The intruders must be hiding on this floor!

The leader, a typical German, in a black uniform with a gaudily be-badged cap, snarled out orders for a search. Two of the Storm Troopers stood guard at the top of the stairs. The rest started making a thorough search.

They soon got to the case under the one in which the cops were hiding. The pals held their breath. Would the Germans think of looking inside the box on top?

They were not left long in doubt. One of the Storm Troopers satisfied himself, with a vicious kick of his jackboot, that the bottom case contained merchandise and nothing else.

He gripped his pistol by the barrel and crashed it into one corner of the lid of the top box. Jack could not get more than an insecure grip on the inside ribs.

The blow sent the lid slithering from his fingers. One corner spun inwards and caught Ken a thwack on the top of the head. Then the bottom edge slipped away from the side of the packing-case.

Crash! It hurtled to the floor, and the Storm Trooper opened his mouth to call his companions as he saw the two cops crouching inside.

Jack saw that they had only one chance of saving their lives.

"Down the stairs like the deuce if you value your life!" he yelled to Ken.

As the cops sprang forward a fusillade of bullets spattered the case. The pals did not wait for a second salvo. Three at a time, they

raced down the stairs and tore round the first landing.

Zip, zip, zip! Ping, ping, ping!
A hail of bullets told them that the Nazis were hot on their trail.

In a few moments they were thundering down the last flight of stairs. Once at the bottom, they had only to get across to the window they had entered by, then a yell would bring help at the double.

There were dozens of special constables within calling distance who would be only too thankful for something to break their monotonous vigil.

With one wild leap, Jack sprang down the last half-dozen steps. Ken came hurtling behind them. As they crashed to the floor the Nazis tore round the landing at the top.

"This way!" hissed Jack.
They dare not use their torches. If they did they would make a good mark for the Germans' guns. Hands spread out in front of them, they raced between the giant packing-cases.

"We didn't come this way!" muttered Ken.
"We can get through!" hissed Jack.
"We—"

The words died in his throat as suddenly he felt himself hurtling down into space. In the darkness he had run into an open trapdoor.

Crash!
He hit a trestle-table, and the weight of his body jammed down the flat top. He slid to the floor.

Although his shoulders and side were bruised by his fall, Jack managed to scramble to his feet and totter forward. But he had not gone a couple of paces when a snarling, guttural voice ground out:

"Hands up, you accursed Englander!"
Out of the corner of his eye, in the dim light coming through a doorway, Jack saw a black-uniformed Nazi seated in a chair. He

Jack stopped in his tracks and slowly raised his hands. The Nazi evidently had a gammy leg, for he still sat in the chair. His leg must have forced him to stop here while the

As Jack put up his hands he saw a Storm Trooper's black jackboots coming down the ladder which led up to the trapdoor. The Nazi reached the floor, and shot the beam of his torch up into the blackness. In his other hand was his gun.

"Come down, English dog!" he snarled.
A moment later Ken came slowly down the stairs. He was immediately followed by the rest of the Nazis.

Ken had been dumbfounded when Jack had so suddenly disappeared into thin air. By the time he had discovered what had happened the Germans were on him, and he had had no alternative but to put up his hands.

Evidently the lame man was the big boss, for as his eye caught the cops' radiosopes slung over their shoulders, he snapped:

"What are those? Let me see them!"
Half a dozen Storm Troopers sprang forward with mechanical precision and whipped the instruments from the pals' shoulders.

"Give me—" roared the Nazi chief, and grabbed one of them.

He looked at it in a puzzled way for a moment. Then he saw the light-weight headphones, and fitted them to his ears. He touched the dials. A second later he had divined the purpose of the gadget.

"So!" he snarled. "These swinehund have been listening-in to us, have they?"

For some seconds there was dead silence. Gestapo Chief Karl Strasser, now on special duty in England, was one of the most feared of Himmler's execution-squad bosses.

If a man fell foul of Strasser, the best he could hope for was an indefinite sentence in a concentration camp.

"Um!" he grunted, at length. "Have they communicated with the police station? That is the question—that is what we must find out."

He paused again, evidently turning over something in his mind.

"Ach!" he grunted. "They must be taken

away from here at once! See, we have two hours yet before—"

Again he stopped.
"Um! We have some—er—apparatus aboard the ship, have we not? We will take them there to question them. Then we will return at the appointed time. We cannot move the gear we have here. Some of you must stay and guard it. You will have to take the risk of a police cordon being thrown round the building. If there is any danger I will send the launch back for you. Hans, Gustav, and Fritz—you stop. Come on, the rest of you; there's no time to waste."

At the pistol-point the cops were taken to a black motor-boat hidden in a ramshackle tin building just off the river.

She was soon launched, and the pals were pushed aboard. With hardly a sound her silenced engines pushed her through the water, purring softly down-river.

Soon they came to a grimy cargo boat. In the shrouded yellow light from a rusty port-hole Jack caught a glimpse of the merchant flag of a nondescript South American republic.

Most of the ship's company were German. Their guttural snarls clashed unmelodiously with the softer quasi-Spanish accents of the nominal owners.

Strasser spat imperious commands at his men. The pals were marched forward, and there, before their astonished gaze, was another rocket gun, similar to the one on the roof of the warehouse, only smaller. Behind it was a stack of rockets.

"You see that gun?" snarled the Gestapo chief. "I suppose I need hardly tell you that it is used to fire those rockets. Now, tell me, did you communicate with your headquarters when you discovered what we were using the warehouse for? Do any more police know what we are doing there? Come on, talk, or I'll strap you beneath that rocket. When it goes off the momentary blast from the tail will blow your face off!"

The cops' lips remained firmly shut. Not a muscle of their faces moved.

They would gain nothing by talking. Once Strasser was certain that they alone knew of the presence of the Nazis on the Thames, he would not hesitate a second to snarl out an order to the ring of S.S. men to drill them with lead.

Then their weighted bodies would be quickly dropped overboard into the black river.

"Come on," Strasser snarled, "or I'll strap you on!"

The pals stared woodenly at the armed S.S. men.

"Swinehund!" Strasser roared. "Speak curse you—speak!"

But still the cops remained silent.
Strasser's patience was wearing thin.

"Strap the big one under!" he shrieked, gesticulating at Jack.

The Storm Troopers leapt forward and grabbed Jack. They soon had him firmly secured so that his face was within a couple of inches of the tail of the rocket, and one of them moved to a switch and looked inquiringly at the Gestapo chief.

"One last chance!" Strasser roared. "Did you communicate with the police station?"

But Jack's determined expression showed him that whatever he did he would never find out what he wanted to know, and what little self-control he had left vanished.

"Pull the switch! Pull it!" he shrieked.
The Storm Trooper pushed over the lever which would send Jack to eternity.

Even as he did so, however, there was a thwack from behind Strasser's back, and one of the S.S. men pitched forward with a cry.

The next second Strasser felt himself shoved from behind, and let out a snarl of rage. Completely off his balance, he careered wildly towards the devilish machine.

Ken, unable to stand the sight of seeing Jack's face blown off, had socked one of the Storm Troopers, and then flung himself at the Gestapo chief.

The S.S. men sprang forward to try to stop their leader falling on to the rocket-gun. Too late! With a shriek of terror the seventeen-stone Nazi crashed on to the machine of death.

Boooooom! A crimson spurt of flaming

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death flashed from the tail of the rocket, but instead of speeding up into the heavens the missile hurled straight into the middle of the bunch of blackshirts.

They let out screams of terror, and flung themselves wildly across the deck. The great steel cylinder hit a donkey engine, then ricocheted and shot aft.

Another bunch of Nazis were directly in its path. They tried to fling themselves flat on the deck to get beneath it, but they could not move fast enough.

Two of them were knocked overboard, screaming like madmen. There was another resounding crash, then the sound of smashing timber and falling debris.

Ken saw that the rocket had crashed into a deckhouse, completely demolishing it.

Jack was still lying bound on the base of the rocket-gun. Strasser had fallen on the side of the rocket at the moment it had gone off, and by a miracle his weight had twisted it so that the blast missed Jack's face by a couple of inches. The cop's hair was singed, but otherwise he was unharmed.

The Gestapo chief himself lay prone on the deck. The side blast had pretty nearly burned the jacket off his back.

His head had crashed on to the capstan machinery, and he had been knocked unconscious. Most of the other Nazis had rushed aft in blind terror.

"Quick!" yelled Jack. "Cut me free!" Ken whipped out his knife, and soon had his pal loose.

"We've got to pinch their launch!" cried Jack. "Quick! Let's dive over the side and swim to the stern, where they've left it!"

The cops sprang to the rail, but as they did so one of the Nazis who had been hit by the rocket crawled to his feet and took careful aim with his pistol.

"Stop where you are," he snarled, "or I'll drill you with lead!"

It was point-blank range, and Jack knew it would mean certain death to make a dash for it now. He slowly raised his hands.

Ken followed his example, and the Nazi marched them below. He told off two more S.S. men to cover them while he went to see if Strasser had recovered.

Soon the Gestapo chief came roaring down the companionway. If he had been furious before, he was stark, staring, raving mad now. His face was purple.

"English swine, you shall pay for this!" he shrieked. "We are going back to the warehouse. Evidently you did not communicate with the police station, otherwise there would have been a swarm of your accursed launches here before now. But for what you have done you shall be tortured until you pray for a merciful bullet." He turned on his heel. "Into the launch!" he spluttered. "We can't waste any more time here!"

The cops were soon pushed down into the motor-boat again, and one of the S.S. men took the wheel. Back up the black, silent Thames they purred until they reached the warehouse, where they were marched back down to the basement.

"I will deal with you later!" snarled Strasser. "Now I have urgent business elsewhere. Come on, the rest of you, up to the roof! The U-boats are standing by waiting by now. Watch them closely, Rudolf and Edmund!"

The Nazis lumbered out, leaving the pals facing the levelled guns of the two Germans.

They heard Strasser and his men clattering up the stairs to the top of the building, but the Nazis had hardly been on the roof a couple of minutes when there was the sound of jack-boots again.

Two Storm Troopers came tearing back to the basement, and started a heated argument with the two covering the pals.

From what Jack could make of it a vital piece of gear had got mislaid, and the Storm Troopers were soon on the point of blows.

Jack looked at Ken. The same thought was in both their minds. Now was their chance to break away—probably their last.

Jack's lips silently framed two words: "At 'em!"

In the same instant he brought up his foot at the nearest Nazi's gun. Thwack!

The man let out a howl of pain as the

weapon was torn from his fingers. It hit the concrete with a clatter.

Ken dived down for it. Two of the Nazis moved in the same second, but Ken beat them to it by a fraction of an inch.

Zip, zip, zip!

He peppered the Germans' legs, and three of them collapsed, writhing in pain. The fourth squeezed the trigger of his gun viciously. Jack and Ken flung themselves to the ground, and bullets sizzled over the cops' heads. Then Ken replied.

Zip, zip, zip!

One of his shots found the Nazi's gun-hand, and with a scream he dropped his pistol.

Jack leapt forward and snatched it up.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Out of this!"

The pals tore up into the store-room.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "You dash out and

give the alarm! Tell them to stop all ship-

ping going down the river! Then tell the

The Nazis saw him coming, and Strasser ripped out an oath.

"Pull the switch! Pull it!" he shrieked at his henchman.

The man at the controls flicked the lever over with a snap, but in that second Jack was on them.

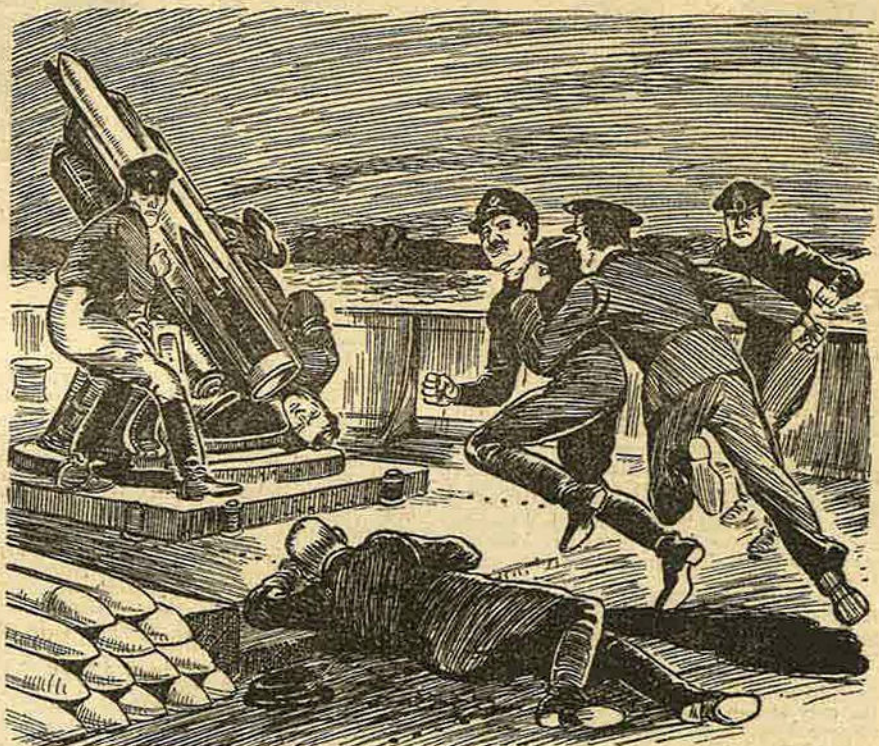
Thwack!

With a perfectly timed left he sent the Gestapo chief staggering. In the same instant Jack shot out his foot in a wild kick at the rocket.

Whoooooshshsh!

The rocket shot upwards. It did not make a terrific amount of noise, but it was far from being invisible, for the toe of Jack's heavy police boot had smashed the special flame-stifling device in the tail.

A red stream of fire, visible for miles, marked the ascent of the Hjalmar rocket into the heavens.



Ken could not stand by and watch the pitiless Nazi fire the rocket, that would mean death to his chum. With desperate determination he freed himself from his guards' hold and flung himself on them.

inspector to surround this place. I'm going up top to try to stop them sending off that rocket!"

"But—" protested Ken. He did not like the idea of leaving Jack to face the Nazis alone.

"Do as I say!" rapped Jack. "If you get outside and yell you'll have half a dozen specials and a couple of air-rail wardens come to see what's the matter!"

He went off into the darkness like a streak of lightning, and Ken turned and ran towards the broken window.

Up into the blackness Jack raced, and at length reached the ladder leading to the trapdoor. He sprang up it and looked out cautiously on to the roof.

The Nazis were standing round the rocket-gun. The missile containing the vital information was still in position.

"That'll be safe enough now," muttered Strasser. "I think we've fixed it without waiting for the staffeller. Right, let her go!"

The man at the switch moved his hand to click it over, and Jack wondered how he could stop the deadly information reaching the U-boats.

Then a daring plan flashed into his brain. He leapt out on to the roof and hurtled across to the gun.

In a very few minutes half the police in London would be speeding down to find out the meaning of this extraordinary contravention of the black-out regulations.

And Jack's kick had done more than destroy the flame stifler. It had knocked the missile completely off its mark. Instead of heading down-river to the U-boats, it was speeding high over North London.

Strasser shrieked with rage. He saw the game was up. Madly he careered across the roof in the grip of hysterical fear.

He crashed into the parapet, and next second pitched head-first over, letting out a wild scream of terror as he hurtled down to the black water.

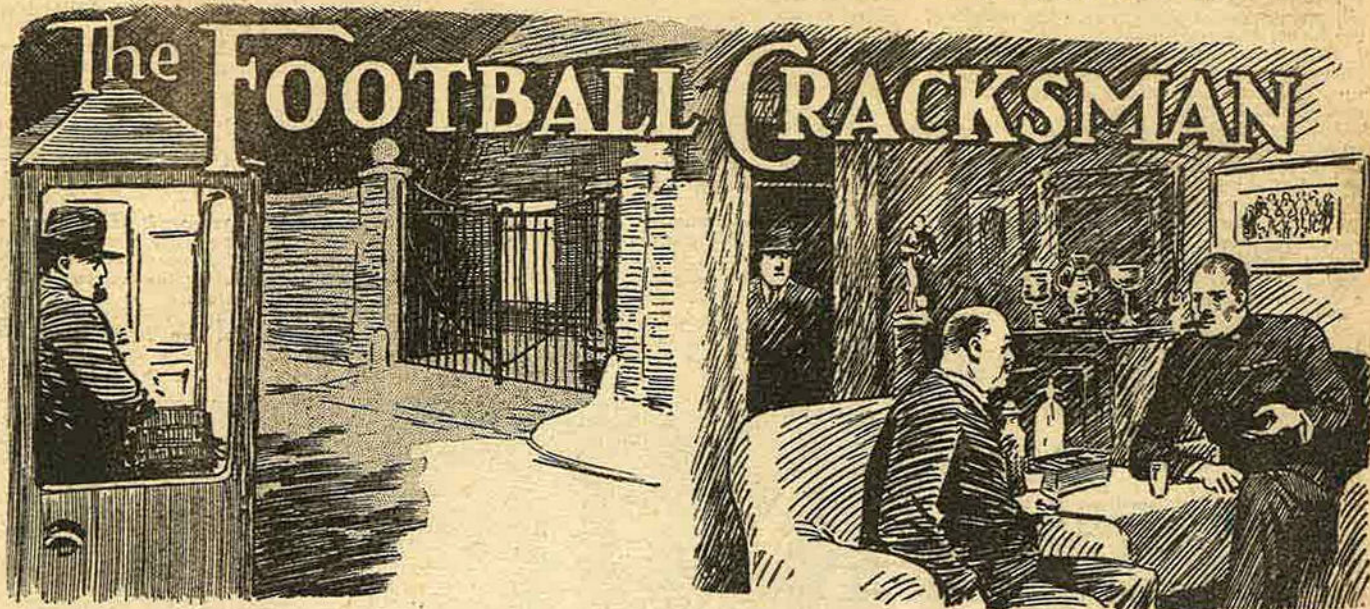
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ONCE AGAIN BLACK MASK TELEPHONES TO SAY "I'M COMING TO ROB YOU TO-NIGHT"



A VISIT TO THE PICTURES

STEVE BRADSHAW, skipper and centre-forward of Milton Rovers, the famous football club, shook his head at Fred Lockhart, the Rovers' goalie.

"Thanks, Fred, but I don't want to put you to the trouble of following me about," he declared. "Don't worry, I can look after myself."

The goalie grinned broadly. "I know that well enough," he admitted. "Just the same, I'm going to stick close to you for the rest of the evening, and not let you out of my sight. It's time that blundering ass, Inspector Collins, was provided with absolute proof that you're not this crook, Black Mask."

Sam Harris, the Rovers' trainer, who was the third person in the room, uttered a choking splutter, as if he was trying hard not to gasp.

It was not surprising that the trainer should betray signs of excitement, for he was the only person who knew that Steve really was the daring cracksmen known to the police as Black Mask.

Inspector Collins, of the Milton Police, was striving energetically to prove that Steve was Black Mask, but, so far, thanks to Steve's nerve and daring, the popular footballer had outwitted the policeman every time.

At the moment Steve and his two friends were in a room in a hotel in Bessington, where the Rovers were staying overnight, after playing a League match against the local team.

Steve had been on the point of setting out on an expedition in his guise as Black Mask, when Fred Lockhart had entered the room.

Steve had hidden his dismay, for there was an important job which he was determined to do before he left Bessington.

"If Black Mask pulls off a coup to-night," continued Fred, "and we're together all the evening, Steve, that ought to be proof enough for anyone that you're not the cracksmen. I shan't be in the way if I come with you, shall I, Steve?"

Steve suddenly grinned.

"Not at all, old man," he protested. "In fact, I think you've got hold of a very good idea. We'll have an evening out together, and you shall see that I don't go getting into mischief, so that you can report my good behaviour to Inspector Collins, if the need arises. Get your hat and coat. I'll join you in the lobby in a couple of minutes."

As soon as the goalie had gone, Sam Harris threw himself into a chair and uttered a grunt.

"That shackles you, Steve. No Black

Mask business for you to-night," the trainer declared.

Steve gave him a mocking grin. "What makes you so sure that Black Mask will change his plans?" he asked.

The trainer gave him a dazed look. "You can't still go through with this stunt!" he protested. "Not with Fred Lockhart hanging round you all the time."

"Sammy," said Steve gravely, "there's something in this town that I've simply got to get hold of. I can't tell you my reason. You'll just have to try to believe that I know best. One day, perhaps, I'll be able to explain."

"I don't care what your reasons are," argued the trainer. "It's pure madness."

"But don't you see?" Steve cried. "If only I can pull it off, what a chance to tie a knot in Collins' tail! Fred will be able to give me a perfect alibi."

"Don't try it, Steve!" begged Sam. "You can't—"

Steve glanced at his watch. "I told Fred I'd be ready in two minutes, and time's up," he remarked briskly. "I mustn't keep my alibi waiting."

He gave Sam a hearty slap on the shoulder, and left the room with a jaunty stride, while Sam wagged his head in utter despair.

Ten minutes later Steve and the Rovers' goalie were walking briskly down Bessington's High Street.

Fred Lockhart kept up a steady flow of conversation, and, although Steve managed to answer him correctly, his thoughts were elsewhere.

Steve had suggested that they should visit a cinema, and the goalie had fallen in enthusiastically with the idea.

Steve had consulted a local paper, and had discovered that the leading cinema in the town was showing a new gangster picture called "Gunman's Vengeance," which was just the sort of stuff Fred enjoyed.

This suited Steve's plans perfectly, for although the picture was one that had just been released, he himself had seen the picture some months earlier at a premiere in London, and remembered enough about the plot and the players to be able to discuss it without seeing it again.

In laying his plans, Steve had taken stock of the fact that it was Saturday evening, and he was banking everything on the hope that this fact would pack the cinema.

When they reached the cinema, Steve's heart gave a jump. His hunch had proved correct. There was a notice-board in front of the box-office which said: "Standing room only."

Fred looked disappointed. "I don't mind standing, if you don't," Steve said.

He knew what Fred's answer would be. "Of course I don't. Let's go in, then," he answered.

Inside the darkened cinema they obtained positions at the back of the aisle. A news reel was just ending. The credit titles of "Gunman's Vengeance" began to appear.

Steve nudged the goalie. "Can you see all right?" he whispered.

"Fine!" his pal assured him. "I'm going to move along a bit. There's somebody's head just front of me," Steve whispered.

"O.K.!", nodded Fred Lockhart. Steve edged along a few yards, and it was not long before the gap between them was filled up by newcomers.

Several times in the first few minutes Fred Lockhart looked round at Steve, and each time Steve grinned and nodded back at him in the dim light.

But very soon, as the movie got into his stride, Fred became far too interested in the drama on the screen to bother about Steve.

Steve waited for about a quarter of an hour, by which time he felt positive that the goalie was completely absorbed in the movie thriller.

Then he quietly slipped along the aisle and left the cinema by a side-exit. He knew that he had at least fifty minutes to spare before the lights went up, and Fred Lockhart started to look for him.

During that time Black Mask, the football cracksmen, would have to put in a lot of energetic and dangerous work.

A BONE, A STRING, AND A TORCH

STEVE'S objective was the house of a certain Mr. Aldersley, a wealthy gentleman who had gathered together an extremely remarkable collection of trophies and curios connected with sport. His big house in Bessington was a museum of sport.

The item which Steve was after was a framed photograph, nearly fifty years old, of the first Rovers team to win the league championship.

The value of the photo, in hard cash, was very small. There were plenty of things of much higher value in the Aldersley collection, and no ordinary burglar would have risked his liberty to lay hands on the picture.

But the picture had once belonged to Steve's father, and had been among the things sold after his death. Steve had his own special reasons for wanting to get hold

of it—reasons which he had confided to no one, not even Sam Harris.

Steve, in his black clothes, was a figure that blended invisibly with the dark shadows as he silently approached Aldersley's house.

He took shelter behind a telephone kiosk, and thoughtfully surveyed the house.

The place was surrounded by a high brick wall, and a pair of iron gates fronted on to the road. From where he stood, Steve was able to see the whole of the house through the grille of the gates.

The windows of one room were brightly lit. One of the windows was partly open, and Steve could distinctly hear voices.

There was a stretch of lawn in front of the house, and at the back there was an orchard of fruit-trees.

It did not look as if Steve was going to find it very easy to carry out his project.

He squeezed behind the telephone-box and fitted swiftly along the base of the brick wall to the gates. The gates were locked, but that did not worry him. The twisted iron-work was easily scaled.

A quick rush carried him across the lawn to the lighted windows. The curtains had not been very carefully drawn, and he had little difficulty in seeing into the room.

Although it served as a drawing-room, the apartment was crammed with items from Aldersley's collection.

There were cabinets crowded with all manner of things that had sporting histories attached to them, the walls were hung with sporting equipment that had been used on famous occasions, and with old prints, pictures, and framed photos.

Steve shifted his head and flattened his cheek against the window pane in an effort to see who Aldersley was talking to.

Then he got a violent shock, and had difficulty in suppressing a gasp of surprise and dismay.

For the sportsman had a visitor, and that visitor was none other than Inspector Collins, Steve's relentless enemy!

It had never occurred to Steve that Collins and Aldersley might be on friendly terms, but now he realised that this must be so, and that, finding himself in Bessington on the Black Mask case, the inspector had taken the opportunity to pay his friend a visit.

On the heels of this unpleasant discovery came another. On the wall, just above the inspector's chair, was a framed photo—the photo of which Steve intended to get hold.

Steve backed stealthily from the window, his thoughts in a turmoil. The task he had set himself had suddenly become a hundred times more difficult and hazardous than he could have imagined that it would be. As he glided back towards the iron gates a daring scheme began to take shape in his mind. It was a scheme full of the dare-devil recklessness which the baffled police inspector had learned to expect from Black Mask.

Steve vaulted the gates once more. Then he glided into the telephone kiosk. After swiftly consulting the directory, he dialed Aldersley's number.

He propped the kiosk door open with his foot, so that he could plainly hear the ringing of the telephone-bell within the house.

Watching through the grille of the gates, he saw Aldersley get up out of his chair and cross the room to answer the phone.

He could hear Aldersley's voice normally, through the open window, as well as over the wire, when he lifed the receiver to answer the call.

"Mr. Aldersley?" asked Steve, in a gruff voice.

"Yes. Who is that?"

"My name doesn't matter," Steve answered. "I just want to warn you to be on your guard. Your house will be burgled to-night."

"What's that?" yelled Aldersley.

"Black Mask has got his eye on you," Steve warned grimly.

Then he hung up the receiver and eased himself out of the phone-box. He could hear Aldersley shouting frantically:

"Confound it, the line's gone dead! The man must have been a maniac. Why should

he warn me that Black Mask is going to burgle my house?"

There came a hoarse cry from Inspector Collins.

"Black Mask!" he echoed in a voice that trembled with fury. "Did you say Black Mask?"

"Yes," nodded Aldersley. "Do you think someone is having a joke at my expense?"

"Anything that Black Mask is mixed up in is a long way from being a joke!" declared the inspector bitterly. "That man has given the police more trouble than any other crook in the country."

"But how does that explain the telephone call?" asked Aldersley, in puzzled tones. "Do you think someone with a grudge against him has double-crossed him?"

"Perhaps," declared the inspector. "But it wouldn't surprise me if that call came from Black Mask himself. It's the kind of fool-hardy bravado that he delights in. But one of these days he's going to be a bit too daring, and then he'll trip up. Perhaps he'll do so to-night."

"By thunder, if he does come, we'll grab him!" promised Aldersley. "Are you armed? No? Then put this pistol in your pocket, and I'll take this rifle. And just to make sure that he won't get away if he once comes inside the grounds, I'll turn the dog loose. If that dog gets its teeth into him, it'll tear him to shreds!"

Steve grinned to himself as he stood with his back flattened against the wall. It seemed as if his reckless action had stirred up a hornets' nest, but he had good reasons for acting as he had done.

He heard bolts and chains rattling and the thud of a door opening. He poked his head forward cautiously to peer through the gates, and saw a huge Airedale come tearing out of the house and prance across the lawn.

Steve did not stay any longer.

The alteration in his plans meant that he would have to work much faster than he had intended if he were to get back to the cinema before Fred Lockhart had a chance to note his absence.

Steve went swiftly through several roads until he came to some shops.

Here he bought an odd collection of articles, including a cardboard box, a ball of strong twine, a small torch, and a juicy meat bone.

He was back at Aldersley's house in less than a quarter of an hour, and this time his cracksmanship was complete. He wore his mask and black gloves, and there was a loaded gun in his pocket.

This time he did not attempt to enter by climbing over the front gates.

A brief glimpse in the direction of the lawn showed him the slinking figure of the Airedale watchdog prowling restlessly up and down, ready to give any intruder a rough handling.

Keeping close to the wall, Steve followed it round to the rear of the grounds, where branches from the trees in the orchard overhung the top of the wall.

Steve paused in the shadows and made his preparations.

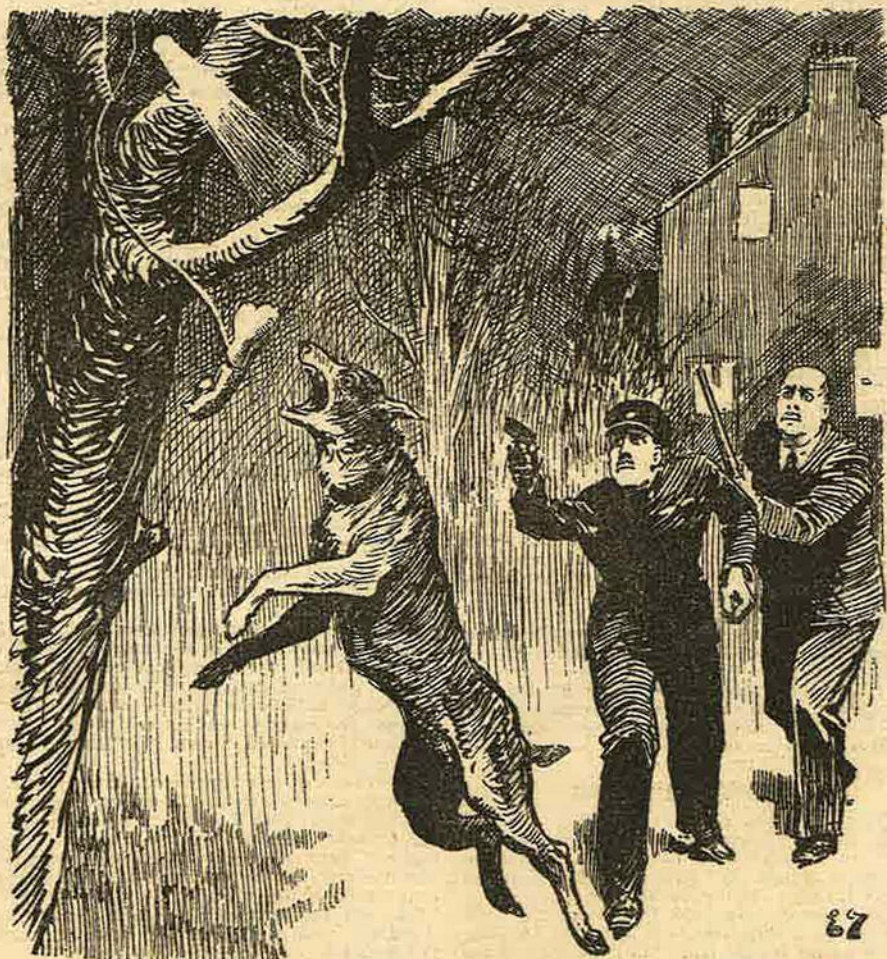
He unreeled about twelve feet of the twine, and tied the big meat bone to the end of it. A few feet farther up he made a loop in the twine and tied the torch to the line.

Then, with an athletic spring, he gained the top of the wall and swung himself along a stout branch.

The bare twigs of the tree rattled under Steve's weight, and almost at once he heard a swift scuffling as the sound attracted the attention of the prowling dog.

The Airedale uttered a deep, rumbling bark and leaped towards the tree in which Steve was crouching.

Steve promptly switched on the torch, which



"Look!" yelled Aldersley, pointing excitedly towards the jazziing light. "We've got Black Mask! He's treed! The dog's got him cornered! Here's your criminal, Inspector Collins!"

was fastened to the middle of the line. Then he tied the end of the line to a branch, so that the meat bone dangled temptingly a few feet from the ground.

The dog continued to bark excitedly as it leaped about in its efforts to reach the bone.

Every now and again his teeth snapped on it, only to lose it again, and as the bone swung to and fro the flashlight beam wheeled wildly through the branches of the tree.

Steve regained the top of the wall with a quick leap just as wild shouts began to echo from the house.

A door crashed open.

Aldersley, his rifle ready, came tearing out of the house with Collins, gun in hand, close to his heels.

"Look!" yelled Aldersley, pointing excitedly towards the jarring light. "We've got him! He's treed! The dog's got him cornered! Here's your criminal, inspector!"

Collins levelled his gun at the light. "We've got you covered, Black Mask!" he shouted.

The two men were under the impression that Black Mask had taken refuge in the tree, and that the dog was trying to get at him.

Aldersley shouted at the dog in a commanding voice, and at last it trotted to him reluctantly.

"Come down out of that tree, Black Mask!" rapped Collins.

He got no reply.

With a snarl, he began to pace steadily towards the tree, holding his gun ready, while Aldersley, his rifle cocked, circled cautiously so as to cut off the retreat of the supposed victim if he attempted to bolt.

Collins saw something moving.

He uttered a shout and fired several warning shots. He leaped forward. Then he skidded to a stop and stood staring with bulging eyes at the meat bone and the torch, twisting lazily on the twine.

A great bitterness surged through him as he realised that, once again, he had been badly hoaxed.

"What's happened?" cried Aldersley, as he ran forward.

Then he, too, saw the dangling bone. He stood and stared. Then he broke out into a chuckle.

"What's funny?" demanded Collins savagely. "While we're standing here, goggling at that bone, Black Mask is probably looting your place of everything that's worth carrying away. Come on! Back to the house!"

They dashed inside.

At first everything seemed to be in order. Then Aldersley uttered a cry and pointed to a bare patch on the wall, where a picture had been hanging, but which now bore nothing but a card held in place by a thumb tack.

The card contained a crude drawing of a black mask and the single word "Thanks!"

"But I don't understand!" exclaimed Aldersley. "Nothing else has been taken, and that old photo wasn't worth more than a few shillings."

"Where did it come from?" asked Collins. "I bought it at the sale of old John Bradshaw's stuff."

"You mean Steve Bradshaw's father?" demanded the inspector. "By Jove, that's significant! Do you realise that the whole of the Rovers team, including Steve Bradshaw, is in Bessington to-night?"

Aldersley gaped at him. "But you can't mean that Steve Bradshaw might be this Black Mask fellow?" he exclaimed.

"I'm almost certain of it!" grunted the inspector. "But he's been too smart for me so far. I'm going straight along to the hotel where the Rovers are staying."

SUSPICIONS SPREAD

STEVE'S first action on getting clear of Aldersley's house was to pack the picture in the cardboard box. Then he handed it in at a post office, after having addressed it to his own lodgings in Milton.

Then he hurried back to the cinema, paid the price of admission once again, and quietly took up his former position at the back of the stalls.

It was ten minutes later that the film ended

and the lights went up. Fred Lockhart looked round, spotted Steve, and grinned.

"How did you like it?" asked the goalie. "Haven't enjoyed myself so much for a long time," Steve assured him.

Quite a number of people were leaving, and Steve and his pal were able to get seats for the rest of the programme.

When "Gunman's Vengeance" came round again they got up and left, and all the way back to the hotel they discussed the film and the actors.

Then, as they entered their hotel, the first people they saw were Mr. Allen, the Rovers' chairman, and Inspector Collins, who glared balefully at Steve.

"Where have you been?" he snarled. "To the movies," grinned Steve brightly. "They're showing a wonderful picture called 'Gunman's Vengeance.' All about how the American cops catch crooks. You should make a point of seeing it some time, inspector. You might learn something."

Collins gritted his teeth and ignored the insult. "Can you prove that?" he rapped.

"He doesn't need to prove anything," Fred Lockhart put in hotly. "I've been with him all the evening, and I'm a witness that he's been in the cinema for the last three hours."

The inspector's face registered blank dismay.

Steve took him by the arm. "This way to the door, inspector," he purred. "Call again some time if there's anything we can do to help."

Collins was too dazed to resist. His hopes had been shattered so unexpectedly that he couldn't think clearly. He had been so sure that Steve would be unable to give a satisfactory account of how he had spent the evening.

As Steve went out with the inspector Mr. Allen rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I wonder!" he murmured softly. Fred Lockhart gave him a quick look, startled by his tone of voice.

"What's up, Mr. Allen?" he asked. "You're not letting the inspector turn you against Steve, are you?"

"I don't know," muttered the chairman. "Steve's a nice chap, and all that, but sometimes I wonder. There's something mighty fishy behind all this. Listen, Fred. When Steve comes back I want you to ask him this question."

He spoke into the goalie's ear in a low whisper. Fred looked startled, but the chairman hastily hushed his questions as Steve came back.

Fred cleared his throat. "I say, Steve," he began, "what did you think of that bit in the picture where the crooks tortured the hero with a blow-lamp?"

Steve grimaced. "Pretty gruesome, wasn't it?" he answered. "Can't say that I enjoyed that part very much. Well, who's for bed? I think I'll turn in. We've got a long journey in front of us to-morrow."

He departed with a cheery "Good-night." Mr. Allen looked hard at Fred.

"Well?" he asked tersely. "I—I can't understand it," declared the goalie. "There was no such incident in the picture!"

"No," said the chairman sternly. "But I happen to know that, in the original version shown in London, that incident was included. People protested because it was rather horrible, and before the picture was generally released the incident was cut out of the film."

"Gosh!" gasped Fred. "Then you mean—"

"Steve could have slipped out of the cinema while you were watching the film," retorted the chairman, "and it looks to me as if he did. He probably saw the film in London. He couldn't have seen it to-night, otherwise he would have known the blow-lamp incident isn't shown in this town."

"I can't believe that Steve is a crook," insisted the goalie. "What will you do? Are you going to tell Inspector Collins?"

"No—not for a bit, anyway," replied the chairman. "I don't like Inspector Collins

well enough to do his job for him. Besides, the fact that Steve probably did slip out of the cinema doesn't prove that he's Black Mask. But I tell you this, Fred. From now on we'll have to keep a very watchful eye on Steve."

THE crook known as the Boss uttered a snarl of fury as he glowered at the members of his gang gathered in their hideout.

"We're making no headway!" he snarled. "Thanks to Steve Bradshaw, Milton Rovers are playing better than ever. We'll never smash the club if things go on that way. What's more, Black Mask has been busy again."

A slim, cold-eyed crook called Nick laughed derisively.

"You've got Black Mask on the brain!" he jeered. "Forget him. He's just a cheap chiseller. Sure, he burgled a house in Bessington last night, right under Collins' nose, but what did he get? Nothing but an old photograph!"

The Boss scowled. "Don't forget that that photo once belonged to John Bradshaw," he pointed out. "And I've got a hunch that the photo, taken along with a few other odds and ends that Black Mask has been collecting together, may do us a powerful lot of damage. I tell you, we've got to get Black Mask before he gets us."

"That would be easy," murmured Nick, "if only we knew who Black Mask is."

"I've got some ideas about that," murmured the Boss. "Maybe Collins isn't quite such a fool as we think. Maybe he's right when he says that Steve Bradshaw is Black Mask!"

"Aw, you're nutty!" sneered Nick. "Yeah?" grunted the Boss. "Well, get a load of this. First, this Black Mask is obviously someone who is keenly interested in the Rovers. Second, Black Mask and Steve Bradshaw were both in Bessington last night. Third, all the things that Black Mask has stolen so far were once the property of Steve Bradshaw's father, and they aren't things that an ordinary crackman would risk his liberty over."

"John Bradshaw was well on the way to finding out things about us that were mighty dangerous, and we had to put him out of the way. If he passed on any of his information before he died, who's the most likely person for him to have talked to? Why, his son, of course! It all adds up. Steve Bradshaw—Black Mask!"

Another member of the gang uttered a startled gasp.

"Gee, Boss, do you suppose that Steve Bradshaw knows that you killed his father?"

"Shut up!" yelled the Boss. "One more crack like that out of you, and I'll close your mouth for keeps! The coroner's jury decided that John Bradshaw committed suicide, and don't you ever forget it."

The abashed crook lowered his eyes. "Sorry, chief. No offence," he gulped.

Nick nodding thoughtfully, drew his gun. "I think you've got something, Boss," he admitted.

"First of all we've got to make sure that we're on the right track!" snapped the Boss. "The Rovers' next match is a home game against Ringwood City. We shall be there to watch the game."

"Why?" asked Nick, in a puzzled tone. "Because I have arranged for something rather interesting to happen in the course of the game," the Boss assured him grimly. "A trap for Steve Bradshaw. If he really is Black Mask we shall know for certain before that match is over. He's bound to give himself away. My scheme can't fail."

The Boss chuckled softly.

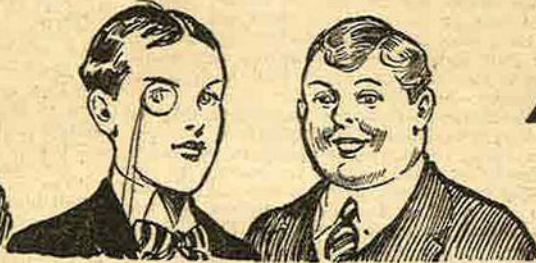
It looked as if there were desperate times ahead for Steve Bradshaw!

What is the Boss' scheme to trap Black Mask? Don't miss next Tuesday's better-than-ever instalment. Tell those chums of yours to place a definite order for TRIUMPH with a newsagent, as our paper is in greater demand every week. By the way, there's news coming about your favourite feature that will delight every one of you.

A PUNCH IN EVERY LINE! THE NEW BOY BELIEVES IN PUNCHING

IT'S

ST. JIM'S



AGAIN!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

PARKER ARRIVES

"HI, youngster!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the most elegant fellow in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, did not turn his head. He did not even know he was being addressed.

Arthur Augustus was strolling along the platform at Rylcombe Station. The local train from Wayland Junction had just come in.

In that train Arthur Augustus expected to see his chums Blake and Herries and Digby, who had been over to Wayland that afternoon.

Arthur Augustus, his celebrated monocle jammed in his eye, continued his leisurely inspection of the train, blind and deaf to a passenger who was looking out of a carriage window and shouting:

"Youngster!"
"Bai Jove, they don't seem to be heah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he failed to detect his chums among the passengers. "I pwesume they have walked it, aifah all."
"Hi!"

Arthur Augustus turned his monocle carelessly upon the shouting youth, who was leaning out of the carriage window and looking towards him. Arthur Augustus supposed he was looking past him.

The youth in the carriage was a big fellow of over sixteen, with a bullet head and prominent features, and wearing a cap stuck at an angle upon a somewhat unruly mop of hair.

"Hi, youngster! Hi!"
"Bai Jove, what an extremely loud and unpleasant voice that chap has!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "I wondah who he's shoutin' to!"

"Hi! You with the glass in your eye?" Arthur Augustus jumped. That description was certainly unlikely to apply to anyone on the platform except himself.

The stranger, then, must be addressing him. There could be no mistake about it. That stentorian shout was intended for his ears.

The eye of Arthur Augustus gleamed with wrath behind the eyeglass. He fixed a stare upon the youth at the carriage window which ought to have petrified him on the spot.

But the big youth did not seem in the least petrified.

"Are you deaf?" he exclaimed.
"Bai Jove! Are you addressin' me?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, driven to speech at last.

"Yes. Is this the station for St. Jim's?"
"Yaas."
"Oh, good!"

The big youth threw open the door of the carriage and stepped out. Arthur Augustus gazed at him with mingled wrath and indignation and contempt.

The fellow did not seem to have the slightest sense of the enormity of the offence he had

been guilty of in addressing Arthur Augustus as a youngster.

From the stranger's question D'Arcy could guess that he was a new fellow for the school. He was big enough to be a senior, but his manners, in D'Arcy's opinion, would have been a disgrace to the Third Form.

The fellow pitched a bag and a rug out of the carriage. Trumble, the old porter, had taken a box and a hamper from the guard's van and put them on a trolley.

The big youth looked up and down the platform; then he fixed his eyes on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You belong to St. Jim's?" he asked.
"Yaas."
"Good! Then you can show me the way."

"Bai Jove!"
"What Form are you in?" inquired the stranger, looking over the elegant junior with a decidedly disparaging expression.

"The Fourth."
"A blessed fag!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I wondah what menagewie this awful boundah has escaped fivom?"

Old Trumble came along, closing the doors of the carriages, and the train moved on out of the station.

"Porter, put my trunks and hamper into a taxi," ordered the big youth.
"Yessir!"

The stranger turned to Arthur Augustus again.
"Now, youngster—"

Arthur Augustus fixed his gleaming eyeglass upon the newcomer.
"Will you kindly wefwain fivom addressin' me?" he said. "I do not desiah to make your acquaintance."

The big youth stared at him.
"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Pick up that rug!"

"What-at?"
"Pick up that rug and carry it for me!"
"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I can only conclude that you are off your wocker. Are you uttah ass enough to think that I shall fag for you, a new boy with the mannaahs of a Nazi?"

The new boy grinned.
"You don't know who I am yet," he remarked.

"I have not the slightest desire to know."
"I'm Parker."
"It is a mattah of uttah indifference to me."

"At Redclyffe," continued the new boy, "I was in the Shell, and the Fourth fagged for me."

"They must have been awful duffahs, then!"
The new boy shook his head knowingly.

"No, they weren't. I should have mopped 'em up if they hadn't. I keep fags in order, I can tell you. I don't stand any cheek. Pick up that rug and carry it to the cab, or I shall mop you up!"

This Week:

THE "MOP-YOU-UP" NEW BOY

Arthur Augustus pushed back his immaculate cuffs. Parker from Redclyffe was nearly twice as big as the swell of St. Jim's, but all the blood of the D'Arcys was boiling in the veins of Arthur Augustus.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Parker.
"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a bullyin' beast, and if you appwroach me I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

The new boy grinned disbelievingly.
"Are you going to pick up that rug?" he asked.

"Wathah not!"
D'Arcy squared up as the giant of a new boy rushed at him, but before Gussy knew what was happening he felt his wrists seized in a vice-like grip; then he received a push that sent him staggering back.

At the same time the new boy reached out and struck Gussy's topper such a blow that it was squashed down over his head.

Gussy sat down on the platform.
"I won't mop you up until the next time," said Parker magnanimously. "Sorry about the topper, but it was looking a bit ancient. Here, get yourself a new one!"

And, tossing Gussy a one-pound note, Parker walked off the platform with his bag and rug, leaving Gussy breathless with rage.

Trumble looked hesitantly at the fallen swell, then wheeled the trolley after the new boy.

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus gasped.
"Bai Jove, he's a dweadful wuffian! Oh deah!"

Parker of the Shell was gone before Arthur Augustus recovered sufficient breath to rise from the platform.

'40 ROT

"LOOKS like a new merchant!"
Monty Lowther made that remark as he, with Tom Merry and Manners, stood in the gateway of St. Jim's. The station taxi had just driven up. On top of it was a bag and a hamper. Inside was a burly youth, who looked out of the window as the taxi drove up to the school.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on idly as it stopped at the lodge and Taggles came out. The big youth descended from the cab.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther eyed him rather curiously. He was evidently a new boy, but he had none of the shrinking modesty of a new boy about him.

"How much?" he demanded of the cabman.
"Four shillings, sir."
"Too much!" declared Parker, and turned to Taggles. "What's the right fare from Rylcombe to here?" he demanded.

"Harsk the cabman!" said Taggles, not at all pleased by the manner of Master Parker.

Parker turned to the three juniors in the gateway.

"What's the fare from Rylcombe, you fellows?" he asked.

"Ten shillings!" said Tom Merry, grinning. Parker glared at him.

"Funny, aren't you?" he snapped. "Here's half-a-crown, cabby, and a bob for yourself! You don't get four shillings out of me!"

Without a word, the old cabby bumped down the box, the bag, and the hamper, and tossed the rug out of the cab, and drove away.

Parker, without a glance at him, came towards Tom Merry & Co.

"I'm a new chap," he explained.

"Not really?" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, really. You wouldn't take me for a new chap, I suppose. You see, I know the ropes," explained Parker. "I've come from another school. I was in the Shell at Redclyffe—that's in Kent I'm going into the Shell here. I'm an old hand. If any chap tries to pull my leg I'll mop him up!"

"Not really?"

"Yes, really," assured Parker. "I could lick any fellow in the Shell at Redclyffe—anybody in the Fifth, for that matter! I never stand any rot!"

"By Jove!"

"I make it a point never to stand any old bunk," explained Parker. "I find it's the best system."

"Oh!"

"Not that I'm a quarrelsome chap—not a bit of it. Only I never stand any funny business—see? What Form are you chaps in?"

"We're in the Shell," replied Tom Merry.

"Oh, good!" Parker seemed pleased. "Is there a tuckshop near here?"

"There's the school shop," said Tom Merry, hardly knowing what to make of this somewhat unusual new boy.

The three chums felt very inclined to take Master Parker by the scruff of the neck and bump him in the gateway, and yet they felt

that behind his bluster he might not be such a bad sort, after all.

"Will you show me the way to the tuckshop?" said Parker.

"If you're a new kid you ought to see your Form-master first," said Tom.

"Oh, he can wait!" declared Parker. "I'm hungry, you see; I've had a long journey. As you're Shell fellows, what about trotting along with me and having some ginger-pop?"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other. It was decent of the new chap to offer to treat them, and it would be churlish to refuse until he gave further evidence that he deserved to be bumped.

The chums led the way to Dame Taggles' little shop in the corner of the quad.

There were several fellows in the tuckshop, and they looked curiously at the new chap.

Monty Lowther presented him with great solemnity.

"Gentlemen, allow me to present Master Parker, who has left his old school because, apparently, there was no one there he hadn't mopped up. He deigns to honour us by coming to St. Jim's, and condescends to come into the Shell. It is a great loss for the Sixth, and we must expect the Fifth to be jealous."

"Which House are you in, new kid?" asked Figgins of the Fourth, amid a general chuckle.

"School House," said Parker. He turned to Dame Taggles. "Ginger-pop, please, ma'am—and jam tarts. Any fellow who cares to join me is welcome," he informed the assembled company.

"Well, I must say that's jolly decent for a School House chap," remarked Fatty Wynn of the New House. "I'll join you with pleasure!"

A number of other chaps in the tuckshop joined Master Parker with pleasure.

A tall and elegant senior who was chatting with another Fifth Former in the shop did not appear to have heard Parker's genial invitation. It was Cutts of the Fifth. Cutts, like Gussy of the Fourth, was a dandy; but, unlike Gussy, he was a snob.

Parker looked at him and noticed he was not accepting the invitation to ginger-pop and tarts.

"Hallo! Won't you trot up?" he asked.

"Thank you, I do not generally consume jam tarts and ginger-beer with fags," Cutts replied, with an insolent smile.

"Don't worry about him," Tom Merry said to Parker. "Cutts is always rather a pig. Aren't you, Cutts?"

But Parker had put down his glass of ginger-pop.

"Listen to me, Cutts!" he said, with a glare at the dandy of the Fifth. "I'm not a quarrelsome fellow, but you called me a fag. Didn't you?"

"Quite so."

"Well, I don't stand any rot from anybody," remarked Parker. "I'm a peaceable chap. But I don't like being called a fag."

"I am desolated," answered Cutts, with mock humility. "I sincerely hope that you are not angry, Master Parker. By the way, are you any relation to Mr. Nosey Parker?"

"Look here,"

snapped Parker "I've already told you that I don't stand any rot. I suppose you're a senior, what?"

"Yes, I have that distinction."

"Well, I don't care if you're in the Sixth. I don't care if you're a prefect. I don't care tuppence for you, whatever you are!" announced Parker. "When I was at Redclyffe I mopped up Fifth Formers!"

"Indeed! You will find St. Jim's a little different from Redclyffe, then," remarked Cutts. "May a fellow inquire why you were kicked out of Redclyffe?"

"I wasn't kicked out of Redclyffe."

"No? Then I'm sure you ought to have been."

"I left because there was a row," explained Parker. "It was through licking a prefect."

"My hat!"

"You see, I never stand any rot. I know how to look after myself. Now, my opinion of you is that you're a cheeky cad."

"What!" yelled Cutts.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Parker!" chorused the juniors.

"Tell him what you think of him!"

"I'm going to!" said Parker. "You called me a fag, Cutts, and I've called you a cheeky cad. That makes us even. But don't give me any more of it, or I'll bundle you neck and crop out of this shop before you can say knife!"

Cutts stared at the new junior in amazement and rage. Cutts, dandy as he was, was an athlete and quite a formidable fighting-man. There was certainly no junior at St. Jim's who would have cared to tackle Cutts in a stand-to encounter.

But Parker from Redclyffe was nearly as big as Cutts, and he was a tremendously powerful fellow; and he was evidently not used to measuring his words.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on, grinning. They enjoyed hearing Gerald Cutts of the Fifth talked to in this way. It was refreshing.

"You—you—" stuttered Cutts. "Why, I'll lick you till you can't crawl! I'll smash you, you cheeky cub!"

"That's done it!" said Parker. "Here goes!"

"Why, what— My hat!" roared Cutts.

Parker was attacking him right and left. The dandy of the Fifth gave ground before the attack, in great astonishment. There was a cheer in the tuckshop.

"Go it, Parker!"

"Give him beans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Steady!" yelled someone. "Not in the tuckshop!"

But the warning was unheeded. The contestants were going at it hammer and tongs.

Cutts had recovered himself and stood his ground, and had closed with the new fellow from Redclyffe.

Then Tom Merry & Co. beheld an amazing sight. Cutts of the Fifth was swept off his feet in the grasp of Norman Parker, and flung headlong through the doorway. He bumped down in the quadrangle with a yell.

"My hat!"

"Hurrah!"

St. Leger, the Fifth Former who had been sitting with Cutts, made a movement forward.

Parker turned on him, his big fists up. St. Leger promptly made a movement backwards.

"By gad!" he said, and went out after Cutts, who had got to his feet, but made no attempt to come back into the tuckshop.

"And now I suppose I'd better go and report to my Housemaster," said Parker.

"You had," grinned Tom Merry. "Ask for Mr. Linton."

"O.K.," nodded Parker, and strolled off.

"Well, that merchant takes the cake!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Blessed if I've ever seen a new kid quite like that before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something quite new in new kids," grinned Tom Merry. "And for a peaceable chap it doesn't take him long to get into a row."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He handled Cutts awfully well," remarked Figgins. "He seems a decent sort of ass, but a first-class ass, and no mistake!"

PARKER crossed the quadrangle and looked about him. He was wondering where he could find Mr Linton, the master of the Shell.

"Now, which blessed House is the School House?" grunted Parker, halting. "Here, youngster, which is the School House?"

It was D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third—whom he hailed.

"Hallo! When did you get out of the Zoo?" shouted Wally.

Parker frowned.

"None of your cheek! Is that the School House?"

"Ask a policeman," suggested Wally.

"Look here, you cheeky young nitwit—"

"Why, you thumping ass!" exclaimed Wally, with breathless indignation. "You—Here, wharrer you at? Leggo!"

Parker picked the fag up as if he had been an infant, and mounted him on one shoulder, grinning. All St Jim's swam round D'Arcy minor for a moment, and then he found himself seated on the big youth's shoulder.

"Lemme down!" he yelled.

"You'll take me to the School House," said Parker. "Now, then."

"You—you rotter!" bellowed Wally, his dignity utterly outraged by being carried on a fellow's shoulder like a kid in the First Form. "You—you jabberwock! Put me down, or I'll pull your silly ears!"

"If I put you down, I'll land you on your head," said Parker. "And if you don't show me the way to the School House at once, I'll drop you into the fountain."

"My only Aunt Jane! I—I—"

"Now, then!"

"Go and eat coke!" roared Wally.

Parker made a stride towards the fountain.

"Hold on!" gasped D'Arcy minor. "I'll show you the way. There's the School House, you fathead! Anybody but a silly idiot would know that that other rotten old barn wasn't the School House. Now put me down, you rotter!"

Parker carried him as far as the School House, and then sat him down on the steps. He jerked off his cap, and jammed it down his back, and then went into the House.

Wally jumped up, boiling with rage. Never had the hero of the Third, the great chief of the inky brigade, been so unceremoniously treated.

"Why, I—I'll scrag him!" gasped Wally. "I'll kick his shins! I'll—"

Words failed the indignant fag. Completely careless of the Third Former's fury, Norman Leonard Parker strolled into the School House.

JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH

"GUSSY! My word!"

Blake and Herries and Digby stared at their noble chum.

Arthur Augustus had not been able to find a hat in any shop in Rylcombe up to the high standard he demanded, and so when he met his chums on the way home they saw at once that he had been in the wars.

Blake and Herries and Dig were just turning out of the lane from Wayland, at the crossroads, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along from Rylcombe. They met him face to face.

And they stared.

"What on earth have you been doing with your hat?" demanded Blake. "Trying to turn it into a concertina?"

"Bai Jove, I've had a feahful time, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Have you seen anything of him?"

"Who?" asked the three chums together.

"A wotten new kid—a new fellow for the Shell, named Harker or Parker, or something. A feahful beast! I was at the station," explained Arthur Augustus. "I've been to my tailah's, and I thought I'd dwoop in at the station, as the twain was due, in case you fellows came home that way. You didn't come, but that awful wottah did! A disgustin' beast! A wegulah tewwah!"

Blake & Co. grinned. Arthur Augustus was breathing indignation.

"Tell your uncle about it," said Blake soothingly.

"The fwightful cad addressed me as youngster!"

"Awful!" said Blake.

"I should have tweated him with silent contempt, deah boys, but he wanted me to fag for him."

"What?"

"He ordabed me to pick up a wug and cawvy it for him."

"Fagging the Fourth—a Shell bounder and a new kid?" said Blake incredulously.

"You're dreaming, Gussy."

"I am not dweanun'. Blake, though I admit it seemed like a howwid dwean shortlay aftahwards. He said he used to fag the Fourth at Weddlyffe."

"Comes from Reddlyffe, does he? Where's that?"

"I wathah think it is the school near Gwey-fwiah. This howwid wottah was in the Shell there! I suppose he has been kicked out for bein' such a wuffian."

"Why didn't you lick him?" demanded Herries.

"I started lickin' him."

"And what happened?"

Gussy seemed unable to find words to reply, and understanding flashed on the others.

Blake doubled his fists in a suggestive manner.

"I shall have to tackle him," he remarked.

"Weally, Blake, you would hardly have much luck, as I have already failed to lick him."

"Go hon!"

"The fact is, he is a vewy big beast—as big as a semah; and I suppose he is old enough to be in the Fifth, only he is probably too fat-headed to get his wemove! He is as big as Cuts of the Fifth—a fwightfully burly wuffian. He left me gaspin'."

"But you didn't fag for him?"

"Wathah not?"

"If you had we'd have expelled you from Study No 6," said Blake. "I'm anxious to see this merchant. A Shell fellow who wants

to fag the Fourth is worth looking at. He'll find Study No. 6 down on him."

"I don't jump on new kids as much as some chaps," remarked Digby, "but it seems we'll have to start by giving this new kid a hiding."

"Leave that to me," said Blake.

"He's an awf'ly swong beast, deah boy!"

"Well, so am I," replied Blake.

Jack Blake hurried his steps. He was anxious to get to St. Jim's and see the unusual new boy. The mere idea of a junior in the Shell trying to fag the Fourth put Blake's back up at once. He was prepared to wade in and wipe up the quad with Master Parker as a preliminary lesson in manners.

The four chums roached St. Jim's and hurried into the School House.

They were late for tea, and tea in the Hall was just over when they arrived. That did not matter to Blake & Co., who generally had tea in their study.

The School House chaps who had had tea in the Hall were coming out, and among them Arthur Augustus spotted the broad shoulders and bullet head of Norman Leonard Parker.

"That's the boundah, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, catching sight of Parker.

"My hat, he is big!" confessed Blake. "But quality is better than quantity any day."

Blake marched up to the new boy.

"You're the new kid?" he asked.

Parker stared at him inquiringly.

"I'm Parker," he admitted.

"The chap who thinks he can fag the Fourth?"

"You bet!"

"Will you step round behind the gym with me?"

"Certainly!"

"Come on, then!" said Blake impressively.

Study No. 6 led the way, and Parker lounged after them, his hands in his pockets. Several chaps who spotted what was on followed them. Hammond of the Fourth tapped Blake on the arm.



Parker picked up the fag as if he had been an infant and, grinning, mounted him on one shoulder. "Lemme down!" yelled D'Arcy minor. "Take me to the School House," said the huge new boy, "or I'll put you in the fountain!"

"You're going to tackle that merchant?" he asked.

"Yes."

"He's tackled Cutts of the Fifth since he's been here."

"Really?"

"He'll make sawdust of you," remarked Levison.

"I'll make sawdust of you if I have any jaw!" growled Blake.

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Levison. "I'm coming to help carry you in afterwards."

Blake turned on him wrathfully, and Levison backed away hurriedly. Whether Blake could tackle Parker or not, there was no doubt at all that he could make rings round Levison. They turned behind the gym, and a crowd of chaps gathered round to see the fun. The fellows who had seen Parker's tussle with Cutts of the Fifth had little doubt as to the result.

"Will you have the gloves on?" asked Blake.

"Not worth while," said Parker.

"Who's going to keep time?"

"No need to keep time," said Parker.

"There won't be more than one round."

Blake snorted with wrath. He tore his jacket off and tossed it to Digby, then squared up to the big Shell fellow.

"Come on, you jabberwock!"

Parker grinned and came on.

For the next minute the scene was very interesting. Jack Blake put up a fight that was really creditable, but he was overwhelmed.

His skill in boxing did not stand him in much stead, for Parker's tremendous drives smashed through his guard. At the end of the minute Blake was gasping on the ground.

Parker put his hands in his pockets.

"Are you going on, you cheeky young bantam?" he asked.

"G-going on?" gasped Blake. "Yes, rather!"

Parker looked surprised, but there was admiration in his tone when he spoke again.

"Better chuck it," he said good-naturedly.

"What's the good of tackling a fellow my size? You haven't an earthly!"

"Not much good, Jack, old chap," murmured Digby.

Blake jumped up and came on.

"Rats!" he said.

There was another licking for the unfortunate leader of Study No. 6. Parker received two or three terrific drives, but he did not seem to mind them. And his big fists smote like flails.

Blake went down again, and this time he couldn't get up. When he tried he dizzily fell down again.

"Now chuck it," urged Parker. "You can see it's no good. What do you want to pick a row with me for? I'm a peaceable chap. I never stand any rot, especially from fags, but I'm a peaceable chap."

"Get up and go on, Blake," chirped Mellish of the Fourth. The cad of the Fourth was quite delighted at seeing Blake licked.

"You ain't finished yet. Don't be a funk!"

Blake turned crimson. He was done, and could not go on. But to be called a funk by a worm like Mellish was bitter.

But a champion of Blake appeared from an unexpected quarter.

Parker swung towards Mellish and caught him by the ear. Mellish gave a yell.

"Leggo, you ass!"

"So you'd call Blake a funk, would you?" said Parker. "Well, you can show that you can do the same as he's done. Put 'em up!"

"What-a-at!" gasped Mellish.

Mellish's idea had been to curry favour with the victor, but he had not succeeded.

"Are you going to put up your hands?" demanded Parker.

"No!"

"Then I'll lick you."

"Keep off! I—"

With a twist of his sinewy arm Parker whirled Mellish over on to his knee, and then his right hand rose and fell with terrific force.

"Spank, spank, spank, spank!"

"Oh! Leggo! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Parker!"

"Spank, spank, spank!"

"Bar Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yarsoo!" roared the unhappy Mellish, wriggling and squirming in an effort to get free.

"Leggo!"

Parker pitched him over on the ground, where he lay gasping. Then Parker turned to Jack Blake, who, with Digby's assistance, had risen and was standing unsteadily on his pins.

Parker went up to him, with a friendly smile, and held out a big hand.

"You're a plucky kid," he said. "Give us your fin. I won't fag you."

Blake glared at him out of swollen eyes.

"You jolly well won't!" snorted Blake.

But he gave Parker his fin. After that the new boy put his hands in his pockets and sauntered away, as though he had just been watching a fight rather than taking part in one.

The chums of Study No. 6 watched him go, and their feelings were mixed. They had thought that Parker was nothing more than a bully, but his treatment of Mellish and the sincere way in which he had shaken hands with Blake made them wonder if they had been too hasty in forming their opinion of the new boy.

"My hat!" said Blake at last. "He's a tough nut, anyway!"

He picked up his jacket, and the chums left the scene of brief combat.

Five minutes later Blake was bathing his eye and nose, and as he did so he thought again of Parker. If that cheerful youth went on as he had begun Blake could clearly see some lively times in store for St. Jim's.

And in that Blake was not mistaken. Norman Leonard Parker had still further surprises up his sleeve which were destined to cause more than one sensation at the old school.

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GUNS OVER THE RIVER



(Continued from page 13.)

Jack rushed across and peered over the edge of the roof. With a gasp he saw the Gestapo chief swimming towards his launch. Even as he watched, the Nazi clambered aboard.

Then came a roar from up-river. It was the reinforcements Ken had fetched, but they would be too late to catch Strasser!

Like a flash, he leapt over the parapet, hurtling head-first down to the river.

Splash! He shot beneath the surface, and came up within a few yards of the launch. A Nazi guarding her was frantically trying to get her to start so that he, too, could escape.

He saw Jack coming over the side, and his

hand flashed down for his gun. Too late! Jack's fist was half-way to his jaw.

Thwack!

The Nazi span head over heels out into the water.

Jack grabbed the wheel. In a couple of seconds he had the launch roaring down river after the Nazi chief, gaining on him yard by yard, until he dropped level.

Then Jack leapt on to the German's boat.

Strasser did not see him coming in the pitch darkness, but next moment he felt his arm almost twisted out of its socket in a vice-like ju-jitsu lock, and his pistol clattered to the floorboards.

Jack shoved him angrily towards the bows. Then, gripping the wheel with his left hand, he gave it a wild swing. The boat lurched drunkenly, then shot crazily across the river.

Jack grabbed up Strasser's pistol and rained the cold muzzle in the nape of the Nazi's neck.

"Take the wheel!" he spat. "Head back up-river!"

In a few minutes they were in the middle of the police boats, and handcuffs were quickly snapped on Strasser.

The Nazis in the warehouse had already been secured. Deserted by their leader, hopelessly outnumbered, they saw it would be suicide to fight.

The inspector detailed a dozen launches to surround the ship, then turned to the pals.

"Splendid work, boys!" he cried. "You've caught one of the cleverest and most dangerous of Germany's Secret Agents, and probably saved scores of British and neutral ships from German torpedoes. Well, Strasser and his pals are going to see some more fireworks soon, but they'll be coming from the rifles of a British firing squad!"

Another excellent River Cops story soon. Next Tuesday—a super-thrilling yarn entitled "The Invasion That Failed" brings Burt Kennedy, ace-spy, back to these pages. Tell those chums of yours to place a definite order for TRIUMPH with a newsagent, as our paper is in greater demand every week.

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