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SCHOOLBOY CRUSOES *versus* DEVIL'S ISLAND CONVICTS! AMAZING STORY OF THE SCHOOLBOY CASTAWAYS.

# The RANGER 2<sup>D</sup>

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# THE CHEERIO CASTAWAYS!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

## A Narrow Escape!

**S**

AMMY SPARSHOTT gave a startled roar.

Bump!

The headmaster of Grimslade hit the earth in front of the hut on Castaway Island with a terrific impact.

Seldom, or never, had Dr. Sparshott been so taken by surprise.

He was standing before the hut, looking out over the bay and the wide Atlantic, shining in the blazing West Indian sun. Jim Dainty came out of the hut, and, making a sudden spring at his headmaster, gave him a violent shove that sent him crashing.

Sammy crashed helplessly. He roared as he crashed. His roar was echoed by a yell of amazement from the juniors, all of whom had seen Jim's amazing act.

"Dainty!" gasped Dick Dawson.

"My giddy goloshes!" howled Ginger Rawlinson. "Potty, or what?"

"You howling ass!" panted Streaky Bacon.

Sammy Sparshott was on his feet in a twinkling. He spun round at Jim Dainty, and grasped him by the collar. If this was an extraordinary practical joke, it was the sort of joke to be discouraged. Lost on a desert island in unknown seas, far from Grimslade School, Sammy was still the "Head," and to be treated with respect as the Head!

"You young rascal!" roared Sammy, as Jim swung helplessly in his powerful grasp.

"What do you mean?"

"Look out!" gasped Jim. "I—"

"Splitz," roared Sammy, "fetch me a bamboo—quick!"

"Mein gootness! I tink tat Tainty must be mat, quite mat, mit himself before!" gasped Fritz Splitz, as he rolled away for a bamboo. Fritz was the only fellow on Castaway Island who ever needed an application of the bamboo, which took the place of the cane at Grimslade. But evidently Jim Dainty was going to get some now.

"Leggo!" gurgled Jim. "I tell you—Look out! I—I—Ow! Groogh!"

"Hallo! Look!" yelled Sandy Bean suddenly. "Dr. Sparshott—look—oh, look!"

Sandy was pointing to the wooden wall of the hut. Dr. Sparshott glanced round at his startled yell. What he saw made him jump and release Jim Dainty's collar very suddenly. An arrow was sticking in the wood, quivering.

For a second Sammy Sparshott gazed at that arrow as it quivered in the wood, spellbound. It was the first arrow that had been seen on Castaway Island—there were no natives there. But Sammy did not stop to think out that startling mystery. Sammy was a man of action.

The sight of the arrow was as startling and amazing to his eyes as the footprint in the sand to Robinson Crusoe. But there was no time to give way to astonishment. That arrow spelt danger, which was Sammy's instant thought.

"Down on your faces!" he barked.

The Grimsladers were accustomed to obeying Sammy's orders promptly. And it was well for them, for as they threw themselves on the earth another arrow flew, and stuck in the wall of the hut a yard from the first. But for their promptness, it was probable that one of them would have been transfixed by it.



But they were down, flattened on the earth—except Fritz, who, having gone into the hut for Sammy's instrument of punishment, wisely stayed there. Sammy, lying on his face, jerked the revolver from his belt. He could see the direction from which the arrow had come, and he loosed off a couple of rapid shots at the palm grove by the river. He could not see his enemy, but he could hear him, for as the shots rang, there was a sound of hurried, scrambling footsteps in retreat.

## THE PERIL OF THE BURNING ARROWS!

"Remain here!" snapped Sammy.

And he crawled away in the direction of the palms, the revolver in his hand, a glint in his eyes which boded ill for the man with the bow, if Sammy came on him. The juniors, still keeping down, watched him go.

"My giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger. "Arrows! Niggers! But we've been all over the island, and there's no natives here."

"It's the French convicts!" answered Jim Dainty quietly. "I spotted that black-haired villain, Lautrec, in the palms as I came out of the hut. He was taking aim at Sammy with bow and arrow."

"Oh!" gasped Dick. "That was why you barged Sammy over."

"Do you think I did it for fun, fathead?" grunted Jim. "The arrow passed just where he had been standing, and stuck in the wall behind him. It would have been through him—there was no time to warn him."

Sammy was out of sight now. He had crept into the palms, and if he came on the convicts there, Lautrec's bow and arrow was not likely to serve him against Sammy's ready revolver. But the schoolboys had little doubt that the ruffian was in retreat after his failure to pick off the headmaster of Grimslade.

The four convicts from Devil's Island were loose, somewhere in the interior. The crazy old boat in which they had escaped from the French penal settlements on the coast of Guiana, still lay on the beach.

Since they had been on Castaway Island the Grimsladers had kept very vigilant watch and

ward, and their own boat was dragged up to the hut at nights. They would have been only too glad if the Devil's Island gang had crept back at night, recovered their crazy craft, and fled to sea in it. But it remained where it lay, blistering in the tropical sun. Lautrec and his gang evidently had no intention of quitting the island and taking their chance at sea again.

Hunting them down in the thick, tropical forests of the interior of the island was a task of danger and difficulty, and it was a problem what could be done with them if they were captured. They were lawless and desperate, but unarmed, and as the castaways had firearms they had supposed that all was safe, so long as they kept watch and ward, and did not venture far from the hut singly. But the arrows quivering in the wooden walls told another tale.

"Here comes Sammy!" said Ginger at last. And the juniors rose to their feet as the headmaster of Grimslade came striding back, his brows grimly knitted.

"Got away, sir?" asked Streaky.

"Unluckily, yes!" grunted Sammy. "Did you see him, Dainty?"

"Yes, sir—it was Lautrec, the leader of the gang. I spotted him as he was drawing his bow."

"That was why you knocked me over?" Jim grinned.

"Thank you, Dainty. As likely as not you saved my life!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "If the scoundrels could get me, they would not expect much difficulty in handling you boys—though I think they might find you rather tougher than they fancy." He smiled.

"That villain Lautrec has brains—the others are merely savage brutes. I am sorry he got away."

Sammy picked one of the arrows from the wall. It was made of bamboo, feathered with parrots' feathers, and barbed with fish bone, in the native way. But the fish bone barb was hard and sharp almost as a razor edge. Had that missile struck Dr. Sparshott it would have been buried deep—the depth to which the point was buried in the wall of the hut told of the force with which it had left the bow. Sammy examined it carefully and thoughtfully.

"Hard work and patience here!" he said. "Our friend Lautrec has made himself bow

and arrows, and no doubt practised archery in the depths of the forest, before he paid us this visit. The scoundrels have not been so idle as I supposed. At a practicable range, this weapon is as deadly as a firearm—or more so, as it is silent." He threw down the arrow, and his face set hard. "Don't go away from the hut—and keep your eyes wide open. We have a new danger to face now—and it may happen any minute."

The warning was hardly necessary. The juniors were not likely to fail in watchfulness now they knew that at least one of their enemies was provided with a deadly weapon, which he knew how to handle with skill. Watchfulness was very necessary, for there was ample cover for an ambush, within easy bow-shot of the hut.

But the long hot hours of the tropical day passed, and there was no further alarm. The leader of the Devil's Island gang had made his attempt—and failed, owing to Jim Dainty's promptness. He was gone again—for good?

Not one of the castaways believed so, and they realised that it was going to be a struggle, for life or death, so long as the convicts remained at large on the island.

### The Mystery of the Night.

**PLOP!** Jim Dainty heard that sound in the silent watches of the night. It was the sound of something falling lightly on the roof of the castaways' hut. It sounded like a falling coconut; but there were no palms overhanging the hut, and the fall was certainly on the sloping thatched roof. Jim was only half-awake, and he heard the faint sound without particularly heeding it.

In the other bunks, Ginger and Streaky, Sandy and Dick, were sleeping soundly, and Fritz von Splitz was snoring at his usual rate. Sammy, in his hammock in the back room, was sleeping also. The door was barred; the window shuttered; in the strongly built hut, the castaways were safe from attack if Lautrec and his gang had ventured to make one.

Jim Dainty would have been as sound asleep as the others, had not a clawing paw awakened him. Jim sat up.

There was a rustling in the dark interior of the hut. In the gloom, Jim could see Friday. The monkey's red-rimmed black eyes were shining and sparkling with excitement, and a hairy paw plucked at him as if to rouse him out. Jim knew those signs—the wary ape scented danger. He turned out of his bunk and drew on his trousers. Then he stepped to the palm-leaf screen in the doorway of the partition.

"Dr. Sparshott!"

There was a movement of the hammock. Sammy woke at the sound of his voice, though it was only a whisper.

"Is that you, Dainty? What is it?"

"I don't know, sir. But Friday is excited about something, and I heard a sound like something dropping on the roof—"

**Plop!** The sound came again as Jim was speaking, and he broke off abruptly. This time Sammy Sparshott heard it. Jim heard him climb quickly out of the hammock, and grope for his clothes.

"You heard that, sir?" breathed Jim.

"Yes; something has been thrown on the roof! I cannot imagine why, but it means that the enemy are here. Waken the others."

Jim stepped back to the bunks and soon roused out the other fellows. Four of them turned out quietly and quickly; but there was an angry grunt from Fritz Splitz as Jim shook him by a fat shoulder.

"Leaf me alone!" grunted Fritz. "Peast and a prute, tat you leaf me to slumper mit meinsel' after."

"Wake up, Fritz!" Jim bent over him and shook him again.

"You prutal peast, I will not vake oop mit meinsel'!" hissed Fritz Splitz. "I vas dired and I vas sleepy! Leaf me in beaces."

"The convicts—"

"Oh grikey! Oh grumbs!" gasped Fritz. That word was enough. Fritz Splitz bounded up—so suddenly that his bullet head came into sudden and violent contact with the face bending over him.

"Ow!" gasped Jim Dainty, feeling as if his nose had been pushed through the back of his head. "Wow! You potty porpoise—ow!"

"Ach! Vat vas tat? I pang mein head on something—"

"Ow! It was my nose, you blithering Boche!" gasped Jim Dainty. "Ow! You've smashed my nose with your silly skull, you bloated bloater!"

There was a chuckle from the fellows dressing in the dark. Jim was clasping his nose with both hands in anguish; but the other fellows seemed to think there was something funny in the incident.

"Plow your nose!" gasped Fritz Splitz. "You have tamaged mein napper mit your silly nose after. I tink tat— Yaroooh! Leggo! Peast and a prutal prunder, tat you trag me not apout mit mein ears."

Fritz rolled out of his bunk with a grasp on either fat ear. He landed on the floor with a bump and a howl.

"Not so much noise, my boys," came Dr. Sparshott's quiet voice.

Sammy stepped out of the inner room, revolver in hand. In the darkness of the hut, it was hardly possible for the occupants to see one another; but Sammy did not put on a light. He groped across to the door, where there was a spy-hole covered by a little sliding shutter. Sliding the shutter aside, the head-master of Grimslade peered out into the calm, starry, tropical night.

A myriad stars glittered in the dark blue vault of the heavens. Over the island hill, a crescent of moon gleamed like a silver sickle. Nothing unusual was to be seen in the starlight in front of the hut; and at the rear it backed on the face of a cliff; it was impossible for the enemy to come from that direction.

Palm-trees and rocks stood out black in the starshine; the beach glistened white, and on the edge of the bay, the convicts' boat lay in its usual place. No life seemed to be stirring on Castaway Island. But any of the trees or rocks might have hidden a creeping enemy at a short distance.

With keen eyes Sammy watched, and listened intently with alert ears, the juniors remaining silent. But there was no movement—no sound, and Sammy was puzzled. He had no intention of opening the door and giving an arrow a chance to whiz into the building. If that was the convicts' game, it was rather too transparent a trick to delude Sammy Sparshott.

While he listened, and the juniors stood silent, Friday, the monkey, was growing more and more excited. He chattered, and then he squealed, and he grabbed again and again at Jim Dainty, as if trying to draw his attention to something. What it was Jim could not imagine; but all the juniors realised that the sharp-witted monkey was aware of some danger of which they were unaware, and that that was what he was trying to make his master understand.

"Can you see anything, sir?" asked Ginger at last, as Sammy turned from the slit in the door.

"Nothing, Rawlinson."

"Friday knows something, sir!" said Jim. "He knew it when he woke me up! He's trying to make us see it, too; but I'm blessed if I can make him out!"

Dr. Sparshott closed the spy-hole, and then lighted a candle. He fixed his eyes on the monkey in the glimmering faint light. Friday was more and more excited. At last he swung himself up to one of the interior joists of the hut, and scratched at the roof. All eyes followed him in wonder. Evidently Friday wanted to draw attention to the roof—why, the Grimslanders could not guess.

"One of the villains has climbed the roof, perhaps," whispered Streaky. Dr. Sparshott shook his head.

"It would creak under his weight," he answered. "It is not that! Something has fallen on the roof—but they can scarcely be tossing pebbles!"

**Plop!** That light tapping sound came again over the startled upturned faces of the castaways.

"There it is again!" breathed Jim.

"Are they chucking stones or coconuts?"

ejaculated Ginger, in wonder. "They're there, at any rate; that's a cert!"

Friday was now frantic with excitement. He chattered and squealed and clawed at the roof. His sparkling, excited eyes gleamed down at the Grimslanders in the candle-light. They knew, from his actions, that the danger, whatever it was, was overhead; but still they could not guess what it was. He was snorting, snuffing, and sniffing, as if his keen nostrils picked up some scent that they had not detected.

Dr. Sparshott set his lips hard. There was danger—the enemy were at hand, and there was dire danger—but even his quick cool wits could not grasp what it was. The Devil's Island gang, from cover at a distance, were pelting the slanting roof at slow intervals with some light objects that fell tapping and did not roll off. What could it mean?

"It's a trick to make us open the door and look out!" muttered Dick Dawson. "To give that brute Lautrec a chance with his arrows, and—"

"Arrows!" murmured Sammy. The word gave him the clue. "They are dropping arrows on the roof—that is it! But why? Lautrec must be aware that no arrow would penetrate—"

He blew out the candle and reopened the spy-hole in the door. The beach glistened white and lifeless in the starlight; there was no sound, no sign of a movement. But Sammy knew that the enemy were there, crouching in cover of rocks or trees. They were keeping carefully out of sight of any wakeful eye in the hut, though probably they believed that the castaways were fast asleep—as indeed they would have been but for the wary vigilance of Friday, the monkey.

But Lautrec and his gang were taking no chances with Sammy's revolver. From some hidden spot, the leader of the Devil's Island gang was whizzing arrows from his bamboo bow, to fall on the slanting roof—why?

Sammy watched. That "plopping" sound came only at long intervals—only one man was shooting arrows, and he was taking his time about it. But why?

Long minute followed minute, as Sammy watched with the eyes of a hawk. If he could have picked up the direction of the man with the bow, there was a chance of a shot in reply. It did not seem easy—but, as a matter of fact, it proved very easy indeed. Suddenly from a dark clump of palms, distant some fifty feet, a point of light flashed in the darkness, describing an arc as it flashed towards the hut.

**Plop!** That sound, like a rattling pebble on the roof, followed. The arrow had landed on the palm-leaf thatch. And now Sammy knew! His startled eye had followed the lighted arrow in its flight.

"Burning arrows!" he breathed.

### In Direst Peril!

**B**URNING arrows!" "My giddy goloshes!" "Purning arrows!" Mein gootness! Ve vas all lead, and purned to teath mit ourselves after!" wailed Fritz Splitz.

Ginger promptly kicked him. The castaways knew now! It was not idly that the black-haired desperado was pelting the roof with arrows. Every arrow that landed on the roof was alight—and they knew now why Friday was so wildly excited. No scent of burning had reached them yet; but the keener nostrils of the monkey had detected it.

The roof, thatched with palm-leaves, was dry as tinder, after days and days of scorching, tropical sunshine. And Lautrec was aiming his arrows in the air, so that they fell point downwards on the roof—and stuck. If the castaways had slept on, they would have awakened with the hut in flames around them!

Friday had saved them—if indeed they could yet combat this strange and unlooked-for peril. Already, they could not doubt, the dry thatch was catching fire from the flaming arcs. But to open the door and step out in the bright starlight was to give the hidden

marksman a chance—the chance he watched and waited for.

Dr. Sparshott shut his teeth hard. He had said that Lautrec was a man with brains; and there was no doubt of it.

Lautrec had fashioned bows and arrows from materials furnished by the jungle. It was not likely that the escaped convicts from Devil's Island had matches—he must have obtained light by flint and steel, or by the friction of dry wood, in the way of the savages. And the steady burning of the arrow in its flight told that the rag tied to it had been steeped in something inflammable, probably resin obtained from a tree. The convict with the black hair was a dangerous enemy.

"Setting fire to the hut!" muttered Jim Dainty. "No wonder Friday was getting excited—good old Friday! But for him—" He shuddered.

But for Friday, the castaways would have awakened in a burning building, to rush out and offer themselves as targets for the convicts' deadly arrows! It had been a fortunate day for the Grimslade castaways when Friday attached himself to Jim Dainty!

"But what are we going to do?" muttered Ginger.

"We vas all tead mit ourselves!" howled Fritz Splitz.

Streaky gave a sniff. "I can smell it now!" he exclaimed.

The smell of burning was now penetrating. It was faint enough, and would hardly have been noticed, had not the castaways been trying to detect it. But it was unmistakable. The dry thatch was burning.

"The hut's burning!" breathed Dick Dawson. "The roof's on fire!"

"For the present," said Dr. Sparshott calmly, "it must burn! We cannot deal with the flames, with that villain watching, in range of his arrows. Lautrec must be dealt with first. Steady the Buffs!"

"We're not funky, sir!" said Jim. "But what—"

"I am sure of that, Dainty! Remain here, and keep cool heads! Bar the window after me."

"You're not going—"

"I am!"

Dr. Sparshott stepped to the window at the side of the hut, removed the bars silently, and opened the shutter. The side of the hut was in dense shadow.

The headmaster of Grimslade dropped swiftly and silently out, and Jim Dainty closed the shutter after him. He had to obey orders, sorely as it went against the grain. And, guessing Sammy's intentions, he knew that Sammy was right.

The juniors stood with throbbing, anxious hearts. If one of the Devil's Island crew had crept close to watch the window— But there was no sound, and they realised, too, that it was unlikely that any of the gang were close at hand.

Plop! Again an arrow dropped on the roof—and they knew, though they could not see, that it was burning. There was no other sound—Sammy Sparshott, outside, was moving as silently as a snake. The smell of burning was strong now; the dry thatch had caught in several places.

Jim Dainty felt the perspiration trickling down his face. To remain in the hut, with the fire eating into the roof over their heads, was a test of nerve. But Jim's thoughts followed his headmaster—as did the thoughts of the other fellows. Only Fritz Splitz's podgy thoughts were concentrated on himself—and in his corner the fat Rhineland mumbled and moaned unheeded.

"Sammy knows where the brutes are!" whispered Ginger Rawlinson. "He spotted where the arrow came from. I wish he'd let us go with him."

"Safer alone!" muttered Jim. "They may spot Sammy—they'd be certain to spot more than one. But—but—"

He broke off in sheer misery.

If the human demon, Lautrec, from his cover in the dusky palms, spotted Sammy in the starlight, his next arrow would not be aimed at the hut—it would be driven to the heart of the headmaster of Grimslade. The endless minutes seemed to drag like hours, days, as the juniors waited and listened.

A faint crackling sound came to their ears. The fire on the thatch was taking deeper hold. But their thoughts followed Sammy—creeping, crawling, stealing through the shadows, making for the spot where the convicts crouched in the palms!

Endless minute after minute—or were they hours? They could guess that Sammy was making a wide detour—he could not come at the enemy from the direction of the hut without throwing away his life. He had to go round, probably a long way round—but when he reached the convicts at long, long last, they would hear the crack of his revolver! But if he fell, they would not hear the silent flight of the arrow that laid him low! Had he already fallen?

"I can't stand this!" groaned Ginger, wiping the sweat from his brow. "I can't!"

Crack!

Clear and sharp through the silence of the night came the sudden ring of a revolver. The shot was followed by a piercing, terrible yell. The juniors gasped at the suddenness of it.

"That's Sammy!" panted Jim.

Sammy had reached the enemy!

Crack, crack, crack! came the ring of the revolver, and wild shouts and howls followed from the night. The juniors could hear the sound of crashing bushes, made by men in frantic flight. But that first, terrible cry they had heard told them that there was one of the Devil's Island convicts who could not flee!

Jim Dainty dragged the bars from the

door. He tore the door open. A tall figure loomed up in the starlight. Faintly, from the distant jungle, came the sound of the convicts in flight. It died away. Dr. Sparshott, cool as ice, with a smoking revolver in his hand, nodded to the juniors.

"Turn out!" he rapped. "Buckets!"

The juniors swarmed out of the hut. Fatty Fritz rolled after them, gasping. The slanting roof of the hut was a sheet of flame, burning and crackling.

"You're not hurt, sir?" panted Jim.

"No, I came on them from behind in that clump of palms!" said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "There was a little trouble! One of them fell—I am sorry that it was not Lautrec—but it was too dark to pick my man. The others ran, or—" He broke off. "Buckets! We must save the hut!"

The convicts—three of them—were gone. What lay in the dark shadow of the palms the juniors did not care to think. Neither had they time—for the next hour they were hard at work, carrying buckets of water from the adjacent stream—keeping up a constant supply for Sammy's sinewy arms to toss on the burning roof.

Hard and fast they laboured, Fritz Splitz taking his share in the work, with an occasional kick to remind him that it was no time for slacking. Even Friday, the monkey, did his bit of fire-fighting!

Blackened with smoke, streaming with perspiration, scorched by the flames, Sammy Sparshott seemed tireless—and the juniors had to be tireless, too, till at last the final spark was extinguished, and they knew that the hut was saved.

"We shall repair the roof to-morrow," said Sammy Sparshott cheerfully. "At present I think you need a little rest."

The weary juniors grinned feebly as they crawled into the hut, sinking with fatigue. For the remainder of that night they slept as soundly as Fritz von Splitz.

They did not hear the howling and snarling of the jackals that crept from the jungle, for what lay in the darkness under the dusky palms.

And Sammy Sparshott, who, as usual, was up at dawn, let them sleep on till the sun was high in the heavens over Castaway Island.

"Ach! Vat is tat?"

Fritz von Splitz, sleeping in the hut on Castaway Island, awoke with a start as something dropped through a hole in the roof into his gaping mouth.

Next moment Fritz let out a terrified yell as he saw Lautrec, the convict, climbing down a rope into the hut!

*Three desperate convicts in possession of the castaways' hut! There are dramatic developments in next week's story of the Grimslade Crusoes—don't miss reading it.*

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