



HIPPOMOBILE!

Inventors all have their trials and setbacks, and their fun, too, as you will agree when you've read this delightful story of Jehoshaphat Jarndyce's weird and wonderful invention.

By
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THE FIRST CHAPTER A Trial Run!

JEHOSHAPHAT JARNDYCE beamed triumphantly.

"This invention," he said in a voice that vibrated with mingled pride and excitement, "is going to make me as famous as Stephenson, Edison, or Marconi."

Tommy Budge grunted sceptically.

"Your inventions always are," he said.

"And," put in Augustus Lane, generally called the "Owl," on account of his solemn mien and horn-rimmed spectacles, "something always goes wrong with them. They're never a success."

He uttered a sepulchral sigh and looked even more melancholy than was his wont.

Jehoshaphat snorted wrathfully.

"You blessed pessimists!" he exclaimed.

"All inventors have their trials."

"You'll get penal servitude as well one of these days," Tommy warned him.

Except for a look of withering scorn, Jarndyce ignored this witticism.

"This is an epoch-making discovery," he declared.

The chums were standing in the big back garden of Professor Jarndyce's house, near Sandleigh, where the scientist had his laboratory. The professor, who believed in bending the twig whilst it is young, gave his son every encouragement in the

exercise of his inventive genius, and Jehoshaphat had a shed of his own, wherein he evolved the most weird and wonderful contraptions, most of which had unexpected and usually painful results. However, Jehoshaphat was never disheartened by these vicissitudes, but went on inventing new devices. The conversation just recorded had taken place when he had announced that he was about to show his latest invention to his chums.

With a magnificent gesture, he now flung open the door of the shed, and waved Tommy and the Owl inside. What they saw made them utter gasps of astonishment.

In the middle of the shed was a huge metal sphere, balanced on three legs. Each leg was made up of a bewildering assortment of powerful springs and heavy, plated joints, whilst the sphere itself was equipped with a small porthole just above the two forelegs.

"What is it?" gasped Tommy as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"The Hippomobile," Jehoshaphat answered proudly.

"The what?" Tommy shouted.

"The Hippomobile," his chum repeated. "Hippos is Greek for horse, and this is a mechanical horse. The machinery inside makes the legs move two at a time in cyclic order, and the machine can go striding

about the country, over ploughed fields and rough ground, through woods and up hill-sides, just as well as it can along a smooth road. That gives it a big advantage over the automobile, and there'll be a big demand for it when I've perfected it and put it on the market."

"My giddy aunt!" Tommy Budge exclaimed faintly, and sank down on an empty crate. "You'll get run in if you go gallumphing about the country in that thing."

"There's no law against it," the young inventor protested seriously. "Anyhow, I'm going to make a trial spin to-night. I've tried it in the garden, but I want to give it a proper trial out in the open, where there's more opportunity for testing its qualities. You chaps care to come?"

"Well," said Tommy doubtfully, "I suppose we had better come to keep you out of trouble, although I shouldn't be surprised if you break all our necks."

"Sooner or later," said the Owl, with a kind of gloomy relish, "one of your inventions will have fatal results. It may as well be this as any other."

Jehoshaphat breathed heavily, and cast about for some withering reply. Words failing him, however, he stalked up to the Hippomobile, reared a short ladder against the sphere, and, mounting this, opened a small circular door. Squeezing in through this, he called to his chums to follow him, and, doing as he said, they found themselves in a tiny apartment. Jehoshaphat told them to seat themselves on a small bench at the rear of the machine, and himself took a seat which was placed immediately behind the porthole, with a bewildering variety of levers within his reach. He pulled one of these and the door clanged into place. Then he touched several others, and there was a whir of machinery that was almost deafening in the narrow confines of the sphere. Finally, he pulled the starting-lever, and the two front legs reared up, and Hippomobile balanced precariously for a moment on the third leg. Then the two raised legs stretched out in response to some further manipulation of the

machinery, and dropped to the ground once more, two yards in advance of their original position.

Straightway one of the fore legs and the hind leg repeated the process, then the hind leg and the other fore leg. And so, the legs moving continuously in pairs, the Hippomobile staggered out of the shed and across the garden, Tommy and the Owl bumping up and down and from side to side on their seat.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Little Sarrum Has a Shock!

HIPPOMOBILE took the hedge at the end of the garden in her stride, and went careering down the road on the far side. His freckled face beaming with delight, the young inventor guided the mechanical horse along this road, over a piece of bumpy waste ground—where the machine rocked perilously and tossed the passengers to and fro in an alarming manner—and finally on to the road that led away from Sandleigh towards the neighbouring village of Little Sarrum. Jehoshaphat had selected this road for the trial spin, knowing that usually it was deserted after nightfall.

All went well for the first quarter of a mile, and they met no vehicles or pedestrians. Then, staggering round a sharp bend in the road, between high hedgerows, they came upon a couple of men. One was Mr. Pepper, a local chandler; the other was Mr. Swales, the village schoolmaster. The two men, who were returning home from a trip to Sandleigh, had heard Hippomobile approaching, and, thinking by the din that it made that half a dozen motor-lorries at least were overtaking them, had halted by the side of the road to let them pass.

The moon was only just rising, a blotchy yellow ball, and the men got but an indistinct view of Jehoshaphat's invention. But that was enough to give them the fright of their lives. Imagine your own feelings if, strolling cheerfully along a lonely country lane, you were overtaken by a weird monstrosity eight feet high, trotting along on three enormous legs, with what appeared

to be one central eye fixed in a glassy stare on you!

The two men were as brave as most people, but they gave one yell apiece and bolted for their lives. Mr. Pepper was a short, stout man, who had not sprinted for thirty years; and Mr. Swales was a sufferer from flat feet and corns. But the pair of them broke a few records during the next five minutes, racing neck and neck for the village.

They rushed into the first open door they came to, which happened to be the tap-room of the Swan and Keys, on the outskirts of Little Sarrum. They entered with

such precipitation that the Chandler barged into a couple of customers who were standing near the counter discussing hurdle racing with mine host, Sam Pecker, and all three staggered to the ground together. The schoolmaster pulled up abruptly just over the threshold, slammed the door behind him, and jammed his back against it.

For a few seconds the air was thick with shouts and threats; then, as the three men scrambled to their feet, the schoolmaster was able to make his voice heard.

"Awful!" he said, with a shudder.

"'Orrible!" added Mr. Pepper, trembling so visibly that his treble chin waggled. "It ain't nat'ral. It oughtn't to be allowed by law, I say."

"Heaven knows what it was!" said Mr. Swales, with another shudder.

"One of them prehistoric brutes, I should say," suggested the Chandler.

"Or else some monstrosity that has



Mr. Pepper, crouching behind a red-currant bush, uttered an ear-splitting yell as the chicken's talons hitched themselves into his hindquarters. He was under the impression that Hippomobile had seized him. (See Chapter 3.)

emerged from the sea," said the schoolmaster.

"Anyhow," said the Chandler, with an air of profound conviction, "it ain't a proper thing to be at large, and it oughter be hunted down."

"'Ere! What's all this?" Sam Pecker demanded rather truculently, mopping his shirt-front, where the better part of a pint of ale had slopped over him when the Chandler had capsized his customers.

Mr. Swales proceeded to give an account of their encounter, and, possessing a powerful imagination and a florid style, he managed pretty effectively to curdle his listeners' blood.

Mr. Pecker wrinkled his brows at the schoolmaster, and shook his head a great number of times. Finally he ejaculated:

"Bah! It's my belief the pair of you 'ave been drinking too much, and been imagining things."

"I'm a life-long abstainer!" Mr. Swales affirmed indignantly.

The innkeeper was about to make some withering comment when several of his patrons, who had been looking rather nervously out of the window, uttered yells of mingled astonishment and fright. Hippomobile had just come in sight, staggering unsteadily about the road, from one side to another.

The fact was that Jehoshaphat found that the controls did not work too well, and that he could not steer the machine properly. But to the startled watchers in the Swan and Keys, it appeared that the monstrosity prowled about the road for a few seconds, then made a sudden dash towards the inn.

Like one man, the patrons of the place stampeded for the back door, knocking down Mr. Pecker in their rush, and tramping heedlessly over his prostrate body in their anxiety to escape.

Jehoshaphat made an unavailing attempt to steer away from the inn, but Hippomobile planted one foot firmly against the tap-room door, sent it flying, and staggered into the place, and danced—or seemed to the unhappy tavern keeper to dance—about the sanded floor in fiendish glee!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

The Hunt!

FOR a few moments Mr. Pecker sprawled on the floor, watching the monstrosity that had invaded his house dance hither and thither, somewhat after the fashion of a gigantic daddy-longlegs. Then, as it came waltzing towards him, he leapt up with a yell that would have done credit to a Red Indian on the war-path, and, bolting upstairs, locked himself in his bed-room.

Hippomobile overturned a couple of settles, then dashed suddenly out through the back door into the yard. There it battered in the side of a chicken-run, and a host of startled fowls fluttered out with a tremendous squawking, one large black cock alighting upon the hindquarters of Mr. Pepper, the wretched man having crouched behind a red-currant bush. The Chandler's

head was buried under the bush, and accordingly he could not see what his assailant was.

As the bird's talons hitched themselves into his nether quarters, he uttered an ear-splitting yell, being under the impression that Hippomobile had seized him. Thereafter he jumped up, reached the yard wall in two magnificent bounds, and, with the startled bird still clinging to the small of his back and squawking loudly, sprang to the top of the wall. He leapt down the other side, almost on top of P.-c. Swift, who had been summoned from the village by one of the frequenters of the Swan and Keys.

The constable had been told that some monstrous creature had invaded the inn, and had been more than a little sceptical of the accuracy of the report. But now, catching only a fleeting glimpse of the Chandler as he sprang over the yard wall, he had a vague impression that a winged, man-like creature, uttering unearthly cries, had assaulted him. He was bowled over by the Chandler before he had time to draw his truncheon. He planted a very heavy, knuckly fist in the Chandler's wind as he went down, however, and Mr. Pepper uttered a final loud shriek and rolled up into a ball, clutching his abdomen.

Thereupon P.-c. Swift pommelled him well and good, until, suddenly realising who his assailant was, he sat up and said in a severe and breathless voice:

"Alf, I'm surprised at you, at your time o' life, playing the fool like this. A-creating a disturbance of the peace, you are, and I've a good mind to harrest you for it!"

Mr. Pepper was too breathless to explain that he had not leapt the garden wall carrying a cockerel on his back for fun. All that he did was to groan, and roll his eyes in anguish.

And then, just as the P.-c. got slowly to his feet, Hippomobile crashed into the yard gate, and, smashing it down, trotted out, and made its way across a common at the back of the inn at a steady five miles an hour.

P.-c. Swift sat down abruptly again, and watched the apparition disappear into the gloom, his mouth gaping wide with bewilderment. Then he rose once more, and staggered weakly into the house, and called in a faint voice for a drink.

One by one most of Mr. Pecker's patrons returned to the tap-room, and, having carefully closed and bolted every door and securely fastened the window-shutters, they engaged in a heated discussion of what had just taken place. Various hypotheses were put forward, but the majority were of the opinion that Hippomobile was some species of giant insect which had escaped from a private zoological collection.

"One of them South American grasshoppers, I reckon," said Mr. Pecker, who had emerged from his hiding-place upstairs. "There's hants and spiders there big as—as bulldogs and helephants."

"I believe," said Mr. Swale, with an air of superior wisdom such as befitted a man of his scholastic attainments, "that it is some kind of marine creature which has emerged from the sea. There are many terrible and amazing forms of living creatures which inhabit the depths of the ocean, and manifest themselves from time to time. I am certain the brute was not naturally a land creature. Its locomotive organs were not adapted to land travel, as anyone could see by its unsteady gait."

"I dunno about locomotive organs," said Mr. Pepper, with deep feeling, nursing a

very swollen nose and patting tenderly at inflamed eyes, "but it's your dooty, Swift, to arrest it. It ain't fit to be at large."

The P.-c. was no coward, but he looked a trifle uncomfortable.

"I think it's a job for the military," he said cautiously.

"It's your dooty to arrest it," Mr. Pepper persisted doggedly.

After a somewhat heated argument, a compromise was arrived at, it being agreed that the P.-c. should seek the aid of Colonel



Mr. Henry Padgers gave one last, despairing shriek as a bullet tore through the bushes in horrible proximity to his person, and then he struggled through the bush and fled like a hare. (See Chapter 4.)

Butcher, who lived just outside Little Sarrum, and was a noted big-game hunter.

At first the colonel was inclined to ridicule the story that the constable told him, but in the end he was prevailed upon to lend his aid, and, armed with a formidable-looking elephant gun, he sallied forth in search of Hippomobile, accompanied by P.-c. Swift and half a dozen of the bolder spirits from the Swan and Keys. The tracks left by the machine were plainly

discernible, and, following these, the hunters reached the sand dunes that stretch along the coast between Little Sarrum and Sandleigh.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

The "Kill" !

MEANWHILE, Hippomobile had plunged gaily across country towards the sea.

"I say!" said Tommy, shouting to make himself heard above the din of the machinery. "Stop the thing! I'm one big bruise!"

Jehoshaphat turned a flushed, perspiring face to his chum.

"I can't!" he answered. "Something has gone wrong with the controls. It was barging into that door did it, I believe."

Tommy Budge and the Owl expressed their feelings in no uncertain way, the latter gloomily remarking that if by a miracle they escaped all other disasters they would probably be drowned by the thing charging into the sea. As by this time Hippomobile was striding across the sand dunes, there seemed an excellent chance that the melancholic youth would prove a true prophet.

Sinking deep into the loose sand at every stride, and staggering like a ship in a gale, Hippomobile climbed to the summit of a dune and blundered down the other side into a narrow valley that ran between the sandhills. And there it came suddenly upon Mr. Henry Padgers. Henry was a gentleman of leisure; in other words, a tramp. He had removed his tattered boots for greater comfort, and was stretched full-length on a piece of soft, dry turf, peacefully dozing.

From this sleep he roused suddenly, to see Hippomobile bearing down upon him. In the feeble light of the yellow moon that was just showing over the top of the dunes, the mechanical horse looked ghastly enough to startle the boldest heart. Henry was not particularly lion-hearted, and after one incredulous glance at the nightmare shape, he bounded to his feet and bolted.

Hippomobile, with a kind of uncanny perversity, persisted in giving chase to the

miserable fugitive, despite all the efforts that Jehoshaphat made to turn it in another direction. The fact of the matter was that the rough travelling over the sandhills had completely put the machinery out of order, and none of the controls worked effectively.

Running was not easy over the sandy track, where innumerable tufts of long, rank grass tripped the feet, and one's way was constantly barred by gorse bushes. Finding that the gigantic daddy-longlegs that pursued him was steadily gaining upon him, Henry hurled himself with a shrill sob of terror into the heart of a bush. Between his fright and the pain that he endured as the prickles dug into him, his screams were blood-curdling.

Colonel Butcher and his companions, who were just approaching the dunes, halted by common consent and stared at one another, rather white of face, being under the impression that some unfortunate wretch was being torn to pieces by their quarry.

Then, as befitted a big-game hunter, the colonel held his gun ready for use, and advanced briskly towards the direction whence came the cries. P.-c. Swift followed, as did the village chandler, who reasoned that the proximity of the elephant gun was the safest spot in the immediate neighbourhood. The rest of the hunters vanished more speedily than they had come.

Dashing up the sand dunes and down the other side, the hunters stumbled over Mr. Padgers' tattered boots.

"Good heavens!" the chandler quavered, his eyes nearly starting out of his head. "The—the brute has devoured him except for—for his boots! Oh, lor'!"

By this time Hippomobile had disappeared round a bend in the valley and was striding purposefully towards the sea again. Following the spoor, the colonel suddenly detected a movement among the gorse bushes, and, convinced that his quarry was lurking there, he flung up the elephant gun and blazed away.

Mr. Henry Padgers gave one last, despairing shriek as a bullet tore through the bushes in horrible proximity to his per-

son, and then contrived somehow to struggle through the bush, leapt to its feet, and fled like a hare. He did not stop until he had put a considerable distance between himself and the sand dunes. Then, as he sank breathless on the ground, he took a solemn vow never again to touch intoxicating liquor, being convinced that he had been a victim of a particularly vivid attack of delirium tremens.

Meanwhile, seeing that the machine was heading straight for the sea and that he could not stop it, Jehoshaphat opened the door in the sphere and yelled to his chums to jump out. They did so, suffering nothing worse than a bruise or two on the soft sand. The young inventor followed them. Then, with the same uncanny perversity that it had previously exhibited, Hippomobile turned suddenly, and blundered back the way it had come.

The colonel was feverishly reloading his gun when the monstrosity came charging down on them. P.-c. Swift bolted incontinently, and Mr. Pepper sought refuge beneath a gorse bush. The colonel, being made of sterner stuff, stood his ground, and waved the elephant gun in a threatening manner.

And then, to his astonishment, three boyish figures appeared, who seemed to be pursuing the monstrous brute.

One of them—it was Jehoshaphat—over-

took it, and grabbed at one of the long legs. He was swung off his feet, and sent flying head over heels into a bush, but his intervention sufficed to turn the machine. It made off at a tangent, climbed swiftly to the top of the dunes, plunged down the other side, and dashed over across the beach into the water.

The last that was seen of it, it was striding purposefully out to sea, and vanished beneath the waves. And for all that is known to the contrary, it may now be marching off to America or the northern coast of Africa. At any rate, nothing more has been seen of Hippomobile.

After what had happened, the chums decided that it would be wise to keep what they knew about Hippomobile to themselves. And so to this day the inhabitants of Little Sarrum sometimes discuss in awe-stricken voices the monstrosity that invaded their village, and the schoolmaster is firmly convinced that his theory that it was a denizen of the sea is the correct one.

As for Jehoshaphat and his chums, they are prime favourites with the colonel, for he insists that they showed most commendable pluck in the way they tackled the brute when even grown men fled from it in terror. And he shows his approbation in a practical way, by giving them the free run of his grounds, and frequently treating them to a first-class feed.



WHEN!

D DICK PENFOLD



WHEN Bunter never tries to borrow,
And eats jam-tarts in moderation:
And says, "You fellows! from to-morrow
I'll never tell a fabrication."

When Harold Skinner scorns to stoop
To any mean or caddish action:
When William Stott and Sidney Snoop
Give universal satisfaction.

When Coker of the Fifth becomes
A modest fellow, meek and humble:
Who never quarrels with his chums
Or gives them cause to grouse and grumble.

When Doctor Locke his birch-rod takes
And breaks it into little pieces:
And says, "My boys, for all your sakes
I have decided flogging ceases!"

When Mr. Quelch is mild and bland,
Full of the milk of human kindness:
And if his class gets out of hand
Makes a pretence of sudden blindness.

When William Gosling, at the gate,
Becomes the merriest of mortals:
And never chides us when we're late,
But promptly lets us pass the portals.

When Mrs. Mimble, at the shop,
Sells us delicious strawberry ices,
And cakes and tarts and ginger-pop,
At less than half the present prices.

When all these changes spring to birth
(Merely a modest list I'm giving),
Then Greyfriars will be heaven on earth,
And life at last will be worth living!