

MAR 2 1940

TRIUMPH 2^d
Every Tuesday

PHANTOM GIANTS OF THE AIR VIVID WAR
STORY INSIDE

TRIUMPH

AND
GEM



A PHONE-CALL—A SHOT—THEN SILENCE. GRIPPING DETECTIVE-THRILLER

DEATH OVER THE WIRE



THE TWO BULLETS

"O.K. I'm coming!" Joe Bird, the young assistant of Dr. Justice, the famous private detective, laid aside his book as the telephone rang shrilly.

He was a cheery, snub-nosed youngster, with a grin that didn't often come off. He grimaced as he reached for the receiver; and then his grin faded suddenly.

A man's hoarse voice came over the wire:

"Dr. Justice—quick! I'm being attacked! In my flat in Babbington Mansions—Garth Glosster! Help! He's coming at me! He's got a gun! Keep back—back, you hound! It's Marsh—Stephen Marsh! He—he—Ah!"

The man's voice broke in a scream. Then came a report that almost shattered Joe Bird's eardrums, a ghastly, choking gurgle, a crash, and the line went dead.

Joe straightened up, and he wasn't grinning any more. As the assistant of a famous detective, he was used to receiving shocks.

"Doc!" he shouted. "Doc!"

A door opened, and into the hall burst a man in carpet slippers.

Ordinarily, Dr. Justice was a short, thickly built man, with a disarming smile which many a crook had discovered too late, masked an inflexible purpose. But now he was just a bunch of steel springs as he leapt to Joe Bird's side.

"What's the matter?" he snapped.

"It's murder, doc! Fellow named Garth Glosster; lives in Babbington Mansions. A bloke called Stephen Marsh shot him while he was phoning you." Joe repeated what had come over the wire. "Golly, I never heard a fellow sound so scared!"

"Glosster?" he repeated. "Garth Glosster—yes? You've heard of him, Joe. Of course you have! He's the financier—one of the big noises in the City. But got the car round. We'll go to Babbington Mansions at once."

"Right-ho, doc!"

Joe's grin had come back as he darted away. He liked nothing better than to be around when Dr. Justice was on a case, and this promised to be the real goods.

He brought the car round from the garage to the house, and Justice took his place at the wheel.

A minute later they were travelling west through the blacked-out streets.

"Marsh!" Justice spoke the name suddenly. "I thought it sounded familiar, Joe, so I looked it up in the files whilst you were fetching the car. Five years ago a clerk of that name, employed by Glosster, got ten years in Bleakmoor for embezzlement. One of the principal witnesses against him was Glosster himself, and Marsh went down, protesting his innocence and vowing revenge."

Joe uttered a long whistle.

"Three days ago," added Justice, "Marsh escaped from prison."



DR. JUSTICE

"And came along to the flat to get his revenge," breathed Joe.

"That's how it looks," nodded the detective. "But here we are. Hop out!"

Babbington Mansions was a block of expensive flats. From the janitor Justice learned that Mr. Glosster had a suite of rooms on the second floor.

Beyond that the janitor was of little help. He was as deaf as a post, and had heard no suspicious sound. He had seen nobody leave the building, and the rooms below those occupied by Glosster were vacant.

Justice borrowed a pass-key and Joe and he went up in the lift. The door leading to the financier's flat was locked, and no reply came to the detective's repeated ringing.

"Servants out!" he snapped; and he got busy with the pass-key.

They stepped into a small lobby, from which several rooms opened. One of them was Glosster's study.

It was in a state of disorder. Drawers had been ransacked and their contents strewn on the carpet; the door of a wall safe was open; the telephone lay broken on the floor.

Justice was beside it in a moment. A quick, amazed gasp broke from him. He had expected to see Glosster's crumpled body lying by the desk.

It was not there.

But there was blood on the desk; more of it on the carpet.

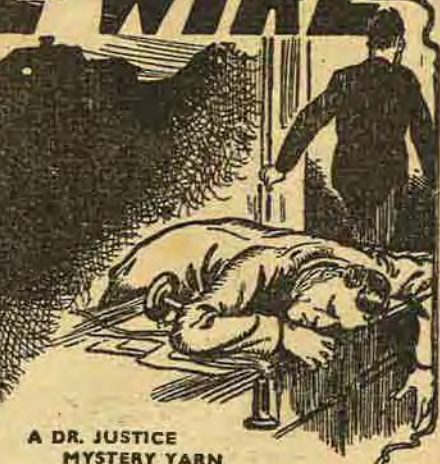
"Have a look through the other rooms, Joe!" snapped Justice. "I don't suppose you'll find Marsh, but he may have hidden the body. Oh, and if there's another phone, ring through to the Yard and ask Inspector Wakeman to come along here."

As Joe obeyed, Justice resumed his scrutiny of the room. A sprinkling of plaster beside the skirting board drew his attention. His gaze travelled upward. Some five feet from the floor a bullet was embedded in the plaster.

That fitted in with what Joe had heard over the wire.

Justice returned to the desk. A message-pad lay there, and he gave it a cursory glance. The top sheet was blank, except for some faint impressions of words written on an earlier page.

The doctor peered at them. They were



A DR. JUSTICE MYSTERY YARN

indecipherable—until he sprinkled them with some greyish powder and blew away the surplus. Then—in part, at least—they were legible.

"...ttery, Penruddock," he read.

There was nothing more, except a finger-print in the bottom right-hand corner of the page.

Justice pursed his lips. Penruddock was a remote village on the Cornish coast. Could it have any connection with the crime?

He peered at the paper again. The writing bore no resemblance to a letter, signed "Garth Glosster," which also lay on the desk.

Then Marsh must have jotted down that address. But why? And the finger-print?

Was that Marsh's, too? A comparison with other finger-prints on some of Glosster's books soon established that they were Marsh's finger-prints.

"Doc!"

Joe's shout came from an adjoining room. Hurrying there, the detective found him beside an open window. An electric torch was in his hand, with which he sprayed the sill.

"Here's the way he went, doc!" said Joe breathlessly. "There's a fire-escape leading down to the yard, and— Look! There are the marks of his hands!"

Justice compared the finger-prints on the grimy sill with those on the page from the message-pad. The finger-prints were similar.

"But they were made when he climbed into the flat, Joe," he pointed out. "Look! Here is a finger-print under a spot of blood!"

"Blood, guv'nor?" gasped Joe.

Dr. Justice nodded his head.

"Did you find Glosster's body?" he asked.

Joe shook his head.

"Not a smell of it, doc."

"I thought not," nodded Justice. "See these other marks on the sill. Something was dragged through the window."

Joe whistled.

"Gosh! That would be Glosster's body. Marsh took it away with him."

Again Justice examined the sill. There were more finger-prints on the outside edge of the sill. He peered at them closely.

"Draw the curtains, Joe!" he snapped. "I want to have a look round the room."

It was evidently Mr. Glosster's bed-room. A splendid satin bedspread covered the expensively carved bed. On it was an oblong depression, where a small suitcase or perhaps a box had rested.

But though Justice searched the room thoroughly, he found no trace of such a case.

"Mebbe Marsh took it—to carry away the bundle," suggested Joe.

Justice said nothing. From the dark crimson satin of the bedspread he had picked up a coarse grey hair, some three inches long.

He examined it through a magnifying-glass. It seemed to have come from a man's

beard, but there was a small, hard blob of some yellowish substance adhering to its root.

"Gum!" snapped Justice. "Now, how did that get there? And why? We'll come back to that later, Joe. And—Hallo, what's that?" He peered at the headrail of the bed.

"What chipped off the corner of that wood?" As he asked the question he caught his breath sharply. Next moment he was on his knees, groping beneath the bed and searching the carpeted floor. Two minutes later he straightened up.

In his fingers was a second bullet. "So the shot you heard over the phone, Joe, wasn't the only one," he said. "This was fired from the doorway, judging by how that rail is chipped. It looks as if it was aimed at somebody standing beside the bed here—perhaps bending over that missing case. And—"

The rest of Justice's words were lost as he stooped beside the bed. On the thick, patterned carpet he saw a tiny spot. Blood? And there were two parallel tracks in the deep pile, an inch or so apart, leading to the door.

They were visible again on the polished floor of the vestibule beyond.

"Something in all that," he muttered, and turned as footfalls sounded in the hall. "That will be Inspector Wakeman, Joe."

It was The Scotland Yard inspector was a tall, spare man, with darting eyes as alert as a bird's.

He listened to Joe's story, examined the bloodstains by the desk, and drew himself to his feet.

"It was murder all right, and Marsh is our man," he said. "We'll check up on those finger-prints, doctor. If they're his, that's good enough."

He turned to the constable who accompanied him.

"Jeffercy," he ordered, "get down that fire-escape and see if you can pick up his trail."

All the policeman discovered, however, was that Glosser's car was missing from the garage attached to the mansions.

Wakeman, meanwhile, learned that the financier's two manservants had been given a night off by their master.

"It's as clear as day, doctor!" the inspector said. "Marsh broke into the flat during their absence, surprised and murdered Glosser, and carried off his body in the car he stole from the garage. Well, you needn't worry any more, doctor. We'll rope him in. I'll ring you about those finger-prints as soon I've checked up with Records."

That call came when a yawning Joe was just about to turn into bed.

"No need to fetch Dr. Justice, son," came Inspector Wakeman's voice over the wire. "You can tell him that those were Marsh's finger-prints, all right. Oh, yes, and the stolen car was seen passing through Staines. So it won't be long before Marsh is back behind prison bars."

Joe carried the message to his chief. "I guessed as much," nodded Justice. "Well, first thing to-morrow, Dicky, you and I are travelling west, too—to a little place on the Cornish coast called Penruddock. And unless I'm much mistaken we're going to upset Inspector Wakeman's theory!"

THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFFS

IT was late the following evening when, after a fast run from town, Justice and Joe drove into Penruddock village.

It was a huddle of whitewashed cottages around a weathered old church, and overlooking a small cove where a few fishing smacks rode at anchor.

In summer-time artists and holidaymakers thronged it; but now, when wild Atlantic gales lashed the cliffs, it was almost deserted.

Justice pulled up at the inn. Ten minutes later he was deep in conversation with the one-legged, ear-ringed landlord, who might have stepped straight from the pages of a pirate book.

"Ottyer or Slattery, maybe," said Dr. Justice. "I'm looking for somebody with a name like that."

The landlord's ear-rings rattled as he shook his head.

"There bea'n't none o' that name in Penruddock, sir, an' man an' boy, I've lived here sixty year. 'Eo be sure 'twere a pussion 'eo be lookin' for?" he asked. "It weren't a place, belikes. Nor the Battery, sir?"

"And what is the Battery?"

"A cottage, it be, sir—standin' 'way up on Penruddock Head," was the landlord's reply. "A rare, lonesome place it be, and 'twern't nothin' but a ruin till a furriner bought it, a year back."

"A foreigner?"

Dr. Justice looked nonplussed, then he realised that in these parts anyone who came from other parts of England was a "foreigner."

"A Londoner, you mean, perhaps?" he suggested.

"Ay! Come from Lammion, I've heard say," nodded the innkeeper. "Name of Smithers. Oldish gent, wi' spectacles and a grey beard."

The detective's eyes gleamed.

"A grey beard?" he repeated.

"Ay! Many a time I've seed him sketching on the Head. But I can't tell 'ee whether he be at the cottage now. Last week he were up here, but he weren't a gent as spoke much of his business."

A fresh customer entered the inn, and the landlord hurried away to serve him.

"What's the big idea, doc?" asked Joe.

Justice did not reply for a moment. Battery, Penruddock. Was that the address Marsh had scribbled on the pad? And Smithers—who was he? Grey-bearded. And it was a grey hair he had found on Glosser's bed!

Was there a connection somewhere?

"To-night we're having a look at the Battery, Joe," said Dr. Justice suddenly.

He said no more, and Joe was quite in the dark when two hours later, they left the inn and climbed a flinty track to the headland, very much in the dark. The night was like pitch, with a shrieking wind blowing in from the sea.

On the cliff-tops it met them with the force of a gale, but now a watery moon was rising.

By its light they found a footpath the innkeeper had described, which eventually brought them to the Battery.

A small stone cottage, it was perched on the very brink of the cliff. From its window one could almost have tossed a stone into the waves that thundered among the rocks two hundred feet below.

"Golly! I wouldn't live here for a thousand quid!" exclaimed Joe. "Give me good old London, even in a black-out. Looks like the Smithers bird isn't at home, doc—or gone to bed, maybe," he added. "Do we knock him up?"

From the shelter of a wall Justice studied the cottage.

Not a crack of light showed from its shuttered windows; the only sound was the shriek of the gale.

"Stay here, Joe," he snapped, "and keep your eyes and ears open."

Like a scouting Redskin the detective stole toward the cottage, gained the door, and for a brief instant his torch winked in the darkness.

Its light sprayed the stone threshold.

There was nothing to tell him whether the cottage was occupied or not. He knocked loudly.

If anybody answered he could easily invent a yarn about his being lost on the cliffs.

No reply came, however, and he got to work on the lock with an ingenious pick of his own invention.

The lock was massive and clumsy, but after a minute's work the tumblers clicked back.

Justice stepped into a dark, damp-smelling living-room.

Guardedly he flashed the torch around. There were dead ashes in the hearth, an undisturbed layer of dust on the table. A book lay there, and, taking it up, he glanced at the fly-leaf.

Written there was the name Charles Smithers.

Justice laid it down with a grunt. Then he padded round the room. There was plenty to interest him, but nothing to suggest that Mr. Smithers was anything but a very mediocre artist.



The rug hid the body of a middle-aged man, and—Bump—bump—bump! Dr. Justice turned at the sound. It had come from the steps by which he had descended from the cottage. A cry and a thud followed; then silence.

Two or three unfinished canvasses lay around, and in the bed-room beyond was a paint-daubed smock. A framed certificate on the wall told that Charles Smithers had passed with credit through a well-known art school. Justice stroked his jaw reflectively. Smithers appeared beyond suspicion, and yet—

Suddenly he stiffened. A hollow, booming sound had come to his ears—from below where he stood, it seemed.

Stooping, he put his ear to the stone-flagged floor. He could hear nothing. He crawled a yard and listened again. The booming was louder. A yard on, it was inaudible.

Only above one of the huge stone slabs forming the floor could he hear it at all.

He scanned the slab closely.

It was no different from its neighbours and fitted closely, except at one spot, where there was a slot through which the blade of a screw-driver could have been thrust.

A tiny sliver of stone had flaked off the adjacent slab.

Justice whistled softly. Next moment he had whipped out a penknife.

Inserting the blade in the slot, he pressed slightly—and the slab moved!

Silently it swung up on a concealed pivot, so cleverly counterpoised that no other effort was needed on the tool's part.

A dark shaft was revealed, with an iron ladder clamped to the wall. From the depths rose the sound of booming waves.

Justice swung himself on to the ladder.

Meanwhile, in the windswept darkness outside, Joe was growing weary of his vigil.

"Bust if I can see what the Doc expects to find up here," he muttered. "Where does this bloke Smithers come in, anyhow? And—golly! What's that?"

A sound had broken into his thoughts. Higher up the cliff ran a stony track, and he had heard the grind of a car in gear.

He heard it again—and then no more.

"Must have stopped," he muttered. "Somebody coming here. I'd better give the Doc the low-down."

He ran quickly to the cottage, and burst in, switching on his torch.

"Doc!"

There was no answer, and the living-room was empty, as was the bed-room beyond.

"Crums! The doc's done a disappearing act!" he groaned. "What—"

The door latch rattled. Joe whirled round. His torch showed the door opening. A man appeared on the threshold—an elderly man, with tinted spectacles and grey beard.

For a moment he seemed utterly taken aback; then his hand dropped to his pocket, and with a quick exclamation, he whipped out a gun.

"Stand where you are!" he snapped.

Joe drew a deep breath. From the innkeeper's description he recognised Mr. Smithers, and the very fact that Mr. Smithers carried a gun suggested to Joe that he was a crook.

He snapped out the torch and flung himself sideways. And then things happened. A rug tripped him up, and he fell headlong, hitting the floor with a jarring crash.

Smithers was on him in a flash—with an agility amazing in so old a man. And his strength was amazing, too.

Half-stunned, Joe found himself pinned to the floor. Struggle as he might, he could not break free. Smithers' one hand fastened on his throat, tightening unmercifully. His other groped over the floor to his left.

There came a click which Joe, with his senses fast leaving him, heard dimly.

The secret trapdoor had opened.

With a fierce laugh, Smithers thrust Joe through it. Joe's clutching hands caught something, clung for an instant, and slipped—and he went down—down!

MR. SMITHERS' SECRET

TORCH in hand, Dr. Justice descended the worn stone steps. He was deep below the Battery now—in the heart of Pen-raddock Head—and the boom of the sea grew louder with every step he took.

Suddenly a massive door of iron-studded oak blocked his path. It was fast, and there

was no sign of a lock. A blur of finger-prints around two of the rusted studs gave Justice the answer to the riddle of how to open it.

As he pressed on them together, there was a click, and the door swung back on well-oiled hinges.

Hardened as he was to surprises, Justice could scarcely suppress an exclamation.

He was looking into a cave—but such a cave! Expensive rugs strewed the floor, and tapestried hangings hid the rocky walls. The furniture would not have disgraced a luxury hotel.

From the roof hung a chandelier of glittering glass, that glowed with rosy light as Justice touched a switch beside the door.

"Mr. Smithers' secret!" he muttered.

He padded across the floor. In the opposite wall was another door, and as he pulled it open a crash of water that almost deafened him, came from beyond the door.

Beyond that door was black, tumultuous darkness. A pencil of light flicked out from Justice's torch and circled like a beam of a miniature searchlight.

It showed foaming, swirling water, filling a vast cavern. Steps led down to it from where he stood, and tied to the foot of them was a sleek, grey-painted motor-boat.

For a long minute Justice stood staring at it. That the cavern had an outlet to the sea was obvious—that Mr. Smithers had been in the habit of leaving the cottage that way was equally obvious.

But, why?

Justice drew back into the cave. For the next few minutes he was occupied in subjecting it to a thorough scrutiny. His discoveries were many and curious.

One was a very modern safe, hardly distinguishable from the rocky wall into which it was built.

Another was a rug-covered heap in a corner. He turned back its edge, and a gasp broke from him.

The rug hid the body of a middle-aged man, and—

Bump, bump, bump!

Justice turned at the sound. It had come from the steps by which he had descended from the cottage. A cry and a thud followed; then silence.

In a flash Justice was at the door, had wrenched it open, and was mounting the steps three at a time.

Where they took a sharp turn, his torch revealed a huddled something lying in an angle of the wall.

He bent over it.

"Joe!" he jerked, and made a swift examination. "No bones broken, as far as I can tell," he muttered. "But—"

Gathering the boy up in his arms, he carried him down to the cave and laid him on a couch. Two minutes later, under his expert ministrations, Joe opened his eyes.

"Doc," he whispered, looking up and around. "Golly! Where are we? And—"

Joe struggled to sit up, giving Justice no time to answer. "He—he's here!"

"Who?"

"The bloke with whiskers! Smithers! Came in a car while you were in the cottage. And—Listen!"

Joe grabbed the doctor's arm. The sound of scraping footfalls—growing nearer and louder—came to their ears.

"He's coming now!" whispered Joe. "He's got a gun!"

"Smithers!" Justice jerked himself erect, drawing Joe to his feet. "Get behind that curtain and stay there! Jump to it!"

Groggily as he was, Joe moved quickly. Then, in a couple of leaping strides, Justice was at the door, flattened to the wall beside it. His fingers touched the switch, plunging the cavern into darkness.

A tense minute dragged by. The scraping footfalls halted outside the door, which at length began to open slowly.

The white beam of a torch flickered over the carpet-hung walls, and a dark figure shuffled with halting, uncertain steps into the cave.

Then—click! Light flooded the cavern as Justice flicked the switch down.

The intruder was the gaunt and bearded man Joe had seen in the cottage.

"Don't turn round! Drop your gun!"

Crisp and commanding the detective's voice rang out. The man's weapon thudded to the carpet.

"Who are you?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Dr. Justice! And the game's up, Smithers—almost!" snapped Justice, stepping forward as he spoke.

Twisting his fingers into the grey beard, he tugged, and it came away in his hand. Another quick snatch removed the tinted glasses, revealing the hard features of a middle-aged man.

"I thought so!" Dr. Justice cried. "Quite a clever stunt! I'm arresting you for the murder of—"

He broke off as the unmasked crook made a sudden dive at him, trying to snatch the revolver.

But Dr. Justice was not to be caught napping. His fist swung up, and caught the crook on the point of the jaw, and he went down in an unconscious heap.

"WELL," said Joe, a minute or two later, when Dr. Justice had clapped handcuffs on his prisoner, "that'll put an escaped convict back into prison to await a trial for murder."

Dr. Justice shook his head.

"An escaped convict, Joe? No. That fellow was never in prison in his life, though he richly deserved it."

Joe's eyes widened.

"But he—he's Stephen Marsh, isn't he?"

Justice shook his head.

"No. Marsh is over there." He nodded towards the rug-covered heap in the corner.

"Dead—murdered! This fellow was his murderer. Mr. Smithers—alias Garth Glosster!"

"Listen, and I'll tell you what happened last night. Marsh, having escaped from Bleakmoor, broke into the flat, in search of evidence to establish the fact that Glosster had framed him five years ago. He didn't find it, but, seeing the case on the bed, he learned of Glosster's masquerade as Mr. Smithers."

"Glosster, you'll have guessed, was a crook. For years he had been fleecing the public; but for months he had lived a double life so that any day he could disappear. By spending an occasional week-end here, he had created a character in the old Mr. Smithers, into whose shoes he could step at the right moment. Nobody would have guessed that the old artist was the absconding financier."

"But Marsh must have opened the suitcase on the bed, which contained Glosster's disguise as Smithers, and that was why he died. Glosster returned, surprised, and shot him in the bed-room. Then, to enable himself to disappear, he set the stage to look as if he himself had been the murdered man, and came here, with the body of his victim, intending, no doubt, to dispose of it later out at sea."

"Coo!" Joe let out a long whistle. "And you saw through his little game! But how?"

"Well, there were two shots fired," smiled Justice. "And there were marks on the carpet, to show that a body had been dragged from the bed-room to the study, where it had been dumped across the desk. And then didn't it strike you as strange that, when Glosster phoned, you heard no single protest from Marsh? Why didn't you hear anything? Because at that time he was dead."

"Finally, there were the finger-prints on the window-sill. Those on its inside edge were Marsh's, made as he broke into the flat; the others, made by the person who left the flat, were Glosster's. And I fancy we'll find any further evidence we need in that safe, Joe."

And Justice was right.

Well, chums, that was Dr. Justice, that was! How did you like him? There'll be many more stories about him if you would like them! Let me know. In the meantime, next Tuesday in the TRIUMPH, Chou-Kung, the Chinese detective and Dick Danvers, his newsboy assistant, will reappear in a thriller entitled: "Who killed Constable Jones?" Order your copy to-day.

VIVID WAR ADVENTURES WHEN THE "BAD LADS" MEET "PHANTOM GIANTS OF THE AIR"

MAD CAREW'S DAWN PATROL



THE PHANTOM KILLERS

SECOND LIEUTENANT FRED FENTON—a newcomer to Mad Carew's famous Squadron No. 353 of the British R.F.C.—entered the "Glory Hole," as the Bad Lads' mess hut had been aptly christened, looking as though he had seen a ghost.

"Have—have you fellows heard what happened over at Squadron No. 148 drome last night?" he cried hoarsely.

A sudden hush gripped the Glory Hole. Joker Jimmy Jameson, the young battle ace captain commanding C Flight, abruptly ceased playing the old and battered piano.

The four young war-hawks clustered at his back, who had been getting ready to bawl out Joker's latest parody on a popular song of the moment, spun suddenly, with faces momentarily tense.

Six more, crowded around a table playing a noisy game of rummy, looked quickly up.

"Shove a sock in it, Fenton!" cried "Baby" Wilson.

"Last night?" said Mike Cotton, with a laugh which did not ring quite as genuinely as he had intended. "Let me see—was there a night last night?"

"Listen, Fenton, me ol' brown son!" Joker Jameson cried. "That subject is taboo in here! That's one of the things that just isn't talked about; so, for the time being, forget it. Queen Anne's dead and so's last night, so—"

"And so are those poor devils over at the One-Four-Eight—" the new young pilot began, when a general uproar from all the Bad Lads completely drowned his voice.

"Shur-rup!"

Fred Fenton stared sullenly around the mess hut—and now the dark rings surrounding his eyes stood out even more conspicuously from his haggard face than before.

"Why not talk of these things?" he cried almost hysterically. "They happened, didn't they—last night—and the night before—and the night before that? Are you all too scared to talk about what's happening around you?"

"Perhaps that's the reason," Joker said quietly; "or perhaps we just want to remain cheerful when there's nothing to be gained by becoming wet blankets. Let's have a song, blokes. You can join in too, if you like, Fred Fenton!"

Turning back to the piano, Joker's nimble fingers sped agilely over the ivories; and then, throwing back his head, he started singing a song, which the Bad Lads, grinning broadly, soon joined in:

"Let's have a jolly good cry—I-I,
Let's have a jolly good snivel.
Sob and sigh and pipe your eye,
Some—h'oo—day we've all got to die.
Let's be melancholy; tears in every eye,
Boo-hoo-hoo till you're all wet thro',
Let's have a jolly good cry."

Biting his lips hard, Fred Fenton glared round at the young war-hawks, most of whom, with handkerchiefs held to eyes, were pretending to cry their hearts out.

Fred Fenton swung angrily upon them.

"D'yer think I'm a kid?" he snarled.

"A moment ago you were behaving like one—and not a very likeable one," Joker retorted promptly.

The new pilot dropped his eyes, but the next moment he faced Joker Jameson again with two red hectic spots blazing upon his cheeks.

"You're not human—this war has killed everything that's decent in all of you!" he cried shrilly. "How can you behave so callously after what happened last night to Squadron No. 148? Either you're all too scared to show it, or your hearts have been drained of all human pity. For three nights now this—this horror has been rife—striking death broadcast among us—wiping out whole squadrons—killing men while they sleep! And you—you laugh about it—and sing—and make fun of everything—"

Joker with a swift sign beckoned the rest of the Bad Lads to remain silent. There was genuine pity for this nerve-racked youngster in his eyes.

Fred Fenton's voice had risen almost to a shriek.

"What do you want us to do, Fenton—sit around holding each other's hands?" Joker said gruffly. "D'you think it would do any good if we all went into mourning and tried to see who could whine the loudest? It's all part of the game, and—"

"Game? Ha, ha! That's good! Game!" Fred Fenton shouted. "I suppose it's part of this game that we're all standing by now, waiting for orders to go up as soon as it's dark? How I hate the thought of night! To-night it may be our turn to meet the phantoms. Have you thought of that? Our turn must come; it may be to-night. By dawn to-morrow there may not be a single one of us left!"

"Perhaps we've all thought about that, Fenton," Joker Jameson said quietly. "Perhaps we've realised that we can't alter things by thinking about it—and so we prefer to sing and joke and laugh. There's nothing heroic about that, or callous, either; it's just plain, common horse-sense! If we're all dead by this time to-morrow—well, that's because we won't have been able to do anything to save ourselves. And as we're not dead yet—well, where's the sense in sitting round moping, and dreading something that hasn't happened—and perhaps never will?"

Joker's hand dropped suddenly upon the new pilot's hand.

His voice was husky when he spoke again, and several of the Bad Lads, who knew their Joker, and believed him to be incapable of anything approaching sentiment, stared quickly at him.

"Believe me, old chap, we're not callous—we've seen too much of this war to ever be that," he said quietly. "We're lost good pals, and we welcome new pals, and the whole thing just goes on and on and on. You've got to laugh at this game; otherwise, you'll go crackers. And when you start laughing at it, then you begin to find out that there is plenty of real good fun to be got. Whether it's a long life or a short one, it's a man's

game. Most airmen, whatever their nationality, are sportsmen, and they play the game—"

"Do you call what happened last night to Squadron No. 148 playing the game?" Fred Fenton asked quickly.

"We don't know yet that Drome No. 148 was attacked from the air—" Joker began, and then his words ended abruptly, as the mess door opened and Sandy MacTavish, the chief engineer, entered, carrying a large bag of what appeared to be jet-black flying overalls.

"What have we got here Sandy?" Mike Cotton cried. "Is the major starting up a nigger minstrel troupe? Sav, blokes, the major would make a good Mr. Interlocketer, wouldn't he—O-oh, I'm sorry, sir! I—I didn't see you there!"

The Bad Lads, checking back a roar of laughter, sprang smartly to attention.

Mike Cotton, putting his foot into it as usual, hadn't seen Mad Carew's dapper little figure partly hidden behind the brawny Scot.

"If I thought, Lieutenant Cotton, that I could black-out your voice as well as your face, I'd start that nigger minstrel troupe to-morrow!" the dynamic little air ace barked.

"I want to see everyone in the operations-room at once. Get dressed into those dark overalls, all of you, with the exception of—" His eyes swept swiftly over the young pilots' tensely eager faces in a penetrating glance that missed nothing. "With the exception of Captain Jameson, who will remain on the ground as my orderly officer; and Second Lieutenant Fenton, who will report sick to the squadron medical officer."

Fred Fenton started violently.

"B-but why me, sir?" he stammered. "I—I'm all right, sir."

"You will learn to obey orders without question!" Mad Carew barked fiercely, the words rattling from his lips like machine-gun bullets. "You need twenty-four hours' sleep, and you may tell the M.O. that I say that he's to see that you get it. It's nothing to be ashamed of, my lad; you haven't yet got acclimatised to this life."

"I'm s-sorry, sir!" the young pilot moaned miserably. "I don't think I have; and I do want to give satisfaction—"

"If I didn't think you were going to do that," Mad Carew barked, "you'd find yourself being packed off to the infantry instead of being sent off to report sick! Your flight-commander, Captain Jameson, has reported that you are shaping very promisingly."

"O-oh, thank you, sir!" Fred Fenton gasped, shooting a sudden glance of mingled surprise and gratitude in Joker's direction.

In the operations-room, Mad Carew, as usual, came straight to his point without preamble.

The Bad Lads, looking strange in their jet-black overalls, listened to their fire-eating little major's words, with the eager light of battle blazing from their eyes.

"You will wear dark face-masks under your goggles!" Mad Carew rapped. "I have issued instructions for your planes to be painted black. At sunset plus twenty minutes—that is, in ten minutes' time—you will take

off, each flight spreading itself over the areas that you see marked upon this chart."

With the point of his cane Mad Carew indicated a large-scale map of the district.

"I have arranged that this squadron shall be the only one in the air to-night," Mad Carew continued. "In consequence, you are to open fire against and attack any plane of any description—or anything else—that you may encounter in the air. Is that clear, gentlemen? You must steel yourselves against being surprised, and the moment that you encounter anything you must open fire at it with your guns. Is that understood? Any questions?"

Something quite foreign to the Bad Lads momentarily swept through the tense atmosphere of the operations-room.

"Yes, major," Baby Wilson said, striving to keep his voice steady. "Can you give us any idea of the type of—or—something—that we're likely to meet, so that we can prepare ourselves for the right attack tactics? I mean, if it's Gothas that have been raiding the dromes the last three nights, then low flying is best, so that we can attack from below."

"I am afraid I can give you no information on the subject, Lieutenant Wilson," Mad Carew answered dryly. "You are going up to-night to attempt to find out what new form of menace the enemy are launching against us. When you have found your enemy, then you must decide swiftly the best method of attack."

"N-not much good using bullets against f-f-f-phantom planes!" stammered "Rabbit" Timson, the superstitious member of C Flight, tightly clutching the rabbit-foot in his pocket which he would never think of flying without. "There is no question of phantom planes," Mad Carew barked savagely, "so get that idea out of your head! The enemy have invented some means of crossing the lines in planes that cannot be heard by our listening apparatus. Their planes, too, must be so well camouflaged that they become practically invisible on these dark nights."

Rabbit Timson made a wry grimace. "And that isn't all about them," he muttered, in an inward whisper which he would not have let Mad Carew hear for the world. "They dive on their objective with engines that no one has ever heard, drop bombs that make no noise when they explode, and then clear off again without being seen by anyone, leaving nothing but dead men behind them. If it's not phantom killers that we're going up after to-night, then what the blue, purple, and scarlet thunder is it?"

And that was the problem which Mad Carew would have given a lot to have been able to solve, and which he was determined to solve that night, or die in the attempt.

MASS MURDER—BY WHOM?

THE flying field of Squadron No. 333 re-echoed to the soul-stirring roar from nearly two dozen 250-h.p. engines being given full throttle by tense-jawed young war hawks prior to taking off.

A rocket soared up towards the pitch-black, moonless sky from a corner of the tarmac, where Mad Carew had just received a report from Tubby Hart, officer commanding night operations, that all were ready.

It was the signal for the take-off.

One after another, the black-painted Bristol Fighters—with their flame-spitting exhausts giving them an eerie, ghost-like appearance—roared thunderously across the flying field, to climb steeply into the air, where they were almost instantly swallowed up in the inky darkness.

Mad Carew sighed heavily as he watched the last plane take off, whilst he wondered deep down in his heart how many of those brave young war hawks—climbing so fearlessly up into the sky to face uncomplainingly whatever perils might await them there—would be alive when the long night was ended.

But Mad Carew, as usual, had saved for himself the most perilous job.

"Anyway, whilst they're up there," he muttered gruffly, "they can't experience what happened to Squadron No. 148 last night. Whatever this new Hun frightfulness is,

they'll at least be able to put up a fight for their lives."

At that moment Joker Jameson emerged from out of the darkness, astride of a powerful motor-bike belonging to the squadron's transport lines.

Mad Carew climbed at once into the sidecar.

"Make straight for No. 63 American Pursuit Squadron drome at Purvaine!" he rapped. "When you're two miles from it extinguish all lights. Stop a quarter of a mile from the drome; we'll have more chance of approaching it unseen on foot. You've got a gun, of course?"

"Yes, major," Joker answered eagerly. "And it's loaded."

"Good! Then get going!" Joker Jameson thrilled as he let in the clutch.

Adventure was the spice of life to the jape specialist of the Bad Lads, and he knew that Mad Carew had honoured him by selecting him for a job that was likely to end in fireworks before the night was through.

The young battle ace was burning with curiosity as he opened wide his throttle, and they flashed along the straight Flanders road at a speed which made the tall trees bordering the road take on the appearance of an unbroken fence.

But he knew better than to attempt to question the dynamic little firebrand seated silently in the sidecar at his side.

Joker Jameson thought of what had happened last night to Squadron No. 148 and of the rumours of the ghastly things that had been found at No. 58 French Escadrille the previous night, and his heart quickened its beat.

Suddenly he stooped forward and nipped the rubber tubing from the acetylene-gas generator to his headlight and tail-lamp. For several minutes the motor-bike and sidecar raced onward through pitch darkness at a reckless pace.

Joker seemed able to find his way through the blackness as if he possessed the eyes of a cat.

Suddenly he throttled down and brought the outfit to a standstill beneath a dark hedge.

"The Yankee drome is just down this lane, major," he said, instinctively dropping his voice to a whisper.

They strode, side by side, down the lane in silence.

A pair of wide-open gates loomed up ahead. Mad Carew's war-bitten face clouded with a puzzled frown as no low challenge from the sentry on duty came from out of the night.

"Purple thunder," he gasped suddenly, "the fellow's asleep, or—"

The words froze upon his lips. The sentry was leaning in a nonchalant attitude against one of the gateposts, with the bayoneted rifle propped against his body!

Joker stretched forward a hand to grasp the American sentry by the lapel of his overcoat and shake him into wakefulness.

Joker was tough, but the next moment he snatched his hand back with a startled gasp.

His fingers were wet with a warm, clammy liquid.

Blood!

The American sentry's body lurched awkwardly, and then slid slowly to the ground, and as it fell a white face stared up into Joker's, looking at him with two glassy, sightless eyes.

"Dead, major!" Joker gasped hoarsely. "Stabbed to death, and recently, too! His blood is still warm—"

The words froze upon Joker's lips as Mad Carew gave vent to a warning hiss.

Wide-eyed, the two Britishers stared across the dark flying field—dark only for a few seconds, and then bathed in a dancing aura of brilliant light.

A huge hangar had burst, with a roaring hiss, into a gigantic column of fire.

Instinctively Mad Carew and Joker jerked their eyes skyward—but there was nothing but a blue void to be seen beyond the rapidly spreading yellow glow from the dancing flames.

"But, major, we heard nothing!" Joker

gasped in an awed whisper. "No planes—no dropping bombs—no explosion!"

"We heard nothing because there was nothing to hear!" Mad Carew hissed fiercely. "Those hangars have been set on fire from the ground! The fiends have struck earlier to-night; we're too late to save the Americans, but we may be in time to stop a few of the raiders from getting away. Come on!"

Creeping from shadow to shadow, Mad Carew led the way in through the gateway and towards the ominously silent officers' quarters.

With each step, the cover offered by the darkness was diminishing—as fresh mysterious fires burst into being among the collapsible hangars and repair-shops.

Joker followed Mad Carew with bated breath.

Still more hangars burst into fire; flames spreading in a gigantic crescent in front of them; fresh conflagrations broke with every passing second—and no sign of life anywhere!

Where were the American pilots, observers, and mechanics who should belong to this blazing drome? Were they all like the sentry at the gate—dead?

If so, then who had struck them down? Who—or what?

Raiders? What raiders could there be? There had been no attack from the air, that was obvious—and this drome was over thirty miles behind the British front line.

No raiding party of ordinary flesh-and-blood could surely be responsible for these all-devouring flames.

The knowledge that darkness had fallen only a brief hour ago added to the sense of unreality which tormented Joker's whole being as he followed cautiously in Mad Carew's wake.

Now they were approaching the American squadron's mess hut.

But if the pilots and observers belonging to No. 63 Pursuit Squadron were still in the land of the living, then surely they would have been abroad, fighting the flames that were ravenously devouring their hangars and the giant bombers which were housed inside them.

Now every canvas hangar in the flying field was a blazing bonfire.

Through a sweeping curtain of rose-tinged smoke, Joker could see giant bombing planes, enveloped in roaring flames, inside the blood-red skeleton structure of the doomed hangars.

Suddenly the young pilot's hand closed in a vice-like grasp upon Mad Carew's arm.

"Look—look, major!" he gasped hoarsely. "What—what are they?"

Mad Carew's eyes jerked round—to follow the direction of Joker's tensely quivering, pointing finger. Joker was pointing straight at the nearest hangar—but all that Mad Carew could see was leaping flames and collapsing canvas walls.

"What did you see?" he asked tensely.

"I—I'm not sure, major—they've gone now!" Joker gasped. "I thought I saw figures—black figures, with weird, terrible heads, like devil-men from another planet! I can almost swear that I saw them, major!"

Mad Carew looked hard at the young pilot. It was not like Joker to get hysterical and start imagining that he could see spooks—he was far too level-headed for that!

This young war-hawk was one of the finest fellows in the world to have at one's side in a rough house.

Mad Carew stared again towards the blazing hangars, but his eyes encountered no sign, either of the drome's legitimate owners or of the strange apparitions that Joker had claimed to have seen.

"There's probably someone there, Jameson, but not spooks," he hissed. "The fiends who have set fire to the place must still be about—those flames cast strange-shaped shadows. Keep your gun ready for quick use."

Joker tightened his fist around the butt of his Service revolver and nodded his head grimly.

Now they were crouched beneath the wall of the Americans' mess hut. Mad Carew raised his head cautiously above the level of the window-sill.

His young companion saw the famous ace start violently and then his war-toughened face became as fixed as a marble mask; it was the face of a man who had gazed upon something which, for the moment, had turned his blood as if to ice in his veins.

Wonderingly, Joker began raising his head towards the window. What was in the room beyond which had caused Mad Carew's face to grow frigid with horror?

Suddenly his breath caught in his throat in a gasp of greater horror than he had ever known before.

His tongue instinctively circled his bone-dry lips; his eyes, held by the ghastly spectacle, felt as though they were being drawn by suction from out of their sockets.

"Mercy alive!" he gasped in a voiceless whisper.

The lights of the long hut had been extinguished, but the flickering, eerie glow from the blazing hangars illuminated its interior all too vividly.

Down the centre of the room there was a long table set for a meal and groaning with goodly viands.

And down each side of that table sat men clad in the American Air Force uniform—as motionless as waxworks.

Half-emptied plates were in front of them; nothing had been disturbed.

They were sitting there as if they had been turned to stone, with their faces pallid and lifeless, and their glassy eyes staring rigidly, sightlessly, straight in front of them.

And Joker, with his heart thudding madly against his ribs, knew that he was staring at dead men!

Men who had been struck lifeless in a passing second, whilst seated at their evening meal, without even knowing that the shadow of the grave had been at their elbow!

"Poor devils—gassed!"

Joker started violently as Mad Carew's whispered voice at his side broke the spell of horror that had dredged his limbs of all power of movement.

"See, Jameson, this pane has been cut out, probably with a diamond," Mad Carew continued, "and it has been carefully sealed again. The hut was filled with some deadly instantaneous gas—probably an invisible gas without either colour or smell."

And then a shout that became almost a voiceless scream, vibrant with abject terror, rang from Joker's lips.

"Look out! Look out, Major! Down—for your life!"

Too late Mad Carew heard the faint whisper of padded feet at his back.

He wheeled round like greased lightning—to catch a momentary glimpse of a black, sinuous shape, surmounted by a hideous head, with large, round eyes and a featureless face. And then something heavy, wielded by his repulsive assailant, crashed down with murderous force on to the side of his face.

A myriad lights blazed before his eyes and seemed to explode in a blinding flash of burning fire that originated from the very centre of his brain.

Blackness closed upon him, and Mad Carew slumped forward to the ground in a limp and unconscious heap.

At the same instant half a dozen black, evil-looking figures stalked stealthily around the corner of the mess-hut at Joker's back.

Then hateful black hands crept like evil serpents over his shoulders as steel talons closed in a murderous stranglehold around his throat.

One, smothered, choked cry rang from Joker's lips ere those cruel fingers robbed his voice of breath and his frenzied struggles began to grow feeble and feeble.

Madly Joker clawed at the cruel fingers clamped around his windpipe—but to no avail.

With his lungs feeling that they must burst, and with the blood beating a thunderous tattoo in the veins of his temples, the

young pilot felt life and consciousness being sapped from out of his being.

ATTACKED BY FRIENDS

A BRITISH Bristol Fighter was droning its way through the inky blackness of the moonless night sky with tensely alert fingers sensitively handling its controls.

Those fingers belonged to Mike Cotton, second-in-command of C Flight—so aptly nicknamed "Unlucky Mike," because everything that he turned his hands to usually went wrong, and generally through no fault of his own.

Mike's whole being was on the alert; his thumbs were never far from the spade-triggers of his twin Vickers; his heart was beating a mad tattoo against his ribs.

It was lonely up there all by himself in that Bristol Fighter, and Mike Cotton, for the first time in his life, was nearly suffering with an attack of wind-up—nearly, but not quite.

"Shucks! If a bloke only knew what he was up against!" he muttered fiercely. "If a bloke could only find something to let fly a little lead at, then it wouldn't be so bad. What does the major expect us to encounter up here? Where's he taken Joker off to? Who are we supposed to be scrapping—Germans or spooks?"

His eyes swept searchingly through the darkness, searching for—what?

Mike was wondering about that as his Bristol Fighter bored its way through the black tunnel of the night, 7,000 feet above solid ground, with nothing but blackness and space surrounding him.

It was as if he was in a world all to himself, and yet a world that might become peopled at any moment with—again, what?

A dog-fight with the odds piled heavily against him was nothing new to Unlucky Mike; in fact, he revelled in such odds-against scraps, and it was usually the Germans who, in this case, were "unlucky," for having hit up against such a demon, dauntless sky battler as Mike Cotton had proved himself to be more than a hundred times.

But this was different.

This was the sort of thing that sapped away

a fellow's guts and backbone, and left him feeling as spineless as a jellyfish.

What was there for him to use his Vickers guns on?

Where would this end up? When dawn came, would he be alive or dead? And if dead, what manner of thing would have struck that fatal death-blow?

No one—at least, no one on this side of the British lines—knew the answer to that question.

That morning, soon after breakfast, staggering, almost unbelievable, news had reached the Bad Lads. During the night Squadron No. 148 had been completely wiped out.

Their hangars had been destroyed by fire. Living accommodation, sleeping-huts, workshops had all gone up in flame and smoke, and there had not been a single survivor left to tell the tale of how such a thing had happened.

Most of the officers and men had been massacred in their sleep. Their charred skeletons had been found the next morning among the smouldering embers of their camp-beds and sleeping-huts, suggesting that death had overtaken them in their sleep.

None of the lifeless men had seemed to make a single bid to escape from their blazing huts.

Sentries and others who had been upon night duties had been found stabbed to death, some with wounds that suggested trench-knives, and others with more ghastly gashes, which pointed to the more inhuman saw-bayonets sometimes used by German soldiers.

The previous night the same thing had happened to a French Escadrille twenty miles down south.

It was rumoured that a similar terrible massacre had taken place on the night before that, even farther south.

And yet on every night the listening posts all along the lines had vowed that no enemy planes had penetrated behind the British lines, because otherwise the drone of their engines would have been picked up by their delicate instruments.

These unexplainable night raids were beginning to affect the morale of every squadron on the Western Front. Everywhere the same question was being asked:



"Look out, major! Down for your life!" Too late, Mad Carew heard the faint whisper of padded feet at his back. He wheeled round like greased lightning—to catch a momentary glimpse of a black, sinuous shape surmounted by a hideous head with large, round eyes and a featureless face.

Whose turn would be next? Who, to-night, would the phantom raiders strike down with their swift and silent death?

Mike wriggled his shoulders uncomfortably, conscious that, despite the biting chill in the air, there were beads of sweat rolling down his spine.

And then for a split-second he literally froze in his cockpit.

What was that massive black shape looming up out of the darkness ahead of him, blocking up the whole night sky as if it was the very Shadow of Death itself that was riding down to envelop him?

A fraction of a second later Mike had galvanised into lightning action again.

To climb would be to head straight into that black, awful shape. Hurling his joystick forward, Mike jerked his throttle open to its widest, and thrust down the Bristol's nose in the start of a screaming power-dive.

The huge black shadow was right on top of him, stretching far to left and right, seemingly filling the whole of the night sky.

Mike was no coward. Fear, until this moment, he had never known. But now there was real fear in his heart—that terror of the unknown which can turn even the staunchest of hearts as if to water.

Convinced that his last moment had come, he instinctively threw up his bent arm to protect his face.

Above the howling scream of his engine he heard a sound like the beating of a million mighty wings, or like the rushing of air raging through an invisible canyon in the sky.

The next moment, with the hateful shape now right above him, Mike Cotton found his Bristol being tossed about the sky like a tiny leaf caught in the vortex of a tropical wind storm.

Believing that he must crash, Mike, battered from side to side of his cockpit, succeeded in switching off his petrol.

Furiously he fought his controls, and by sheer skill succeeded at last in snatching the rebel plane over on to an even keel.

Now a great calm seemed to have settled over the sky. The black shadow had passed by, heading towards the lines, as if disdaining to waste its time upon such an insignificantly puny prey as the Bristol Fighter.

Mike, staring after it, caught a brief glimpse, ere the darkness swallowed it up, of gigantic wings and a long, tapering body, like the body of an enormous dragon-fly.

It was a plane, but one of nightmarish proportions. It was many times bigger than the largest bombing plane that the air force of any of the belligerent countries had ever built.

It was so huge that Mike Cotton had the eerie feeling that he must be watching it through goggles that had suddenly become powerful magnifying-glasses.

"It can't be real! No one has ever invented an engine powerful enough to lift such a monster off the ground!" Mike Cotton gasped fiercely.

Then he realised that there was something that he was intuitively missing.

It was sound! Since he had switched off his own engine he had heard practically nothing excepting that uncanny noise like the beating of millions of invisible wings.

A plane that size would have to have half a dozen huge engines combining together in a thunderous chorus of power, and this sky monster had passed him by in silence!

"A phantom plane, indeed!" Mike gasped hoarsely. "It's a ghost of the sky!"

But there was no longer terror in Mike Cotton's dauntless young heart. With fingers tense but resolute he switched on his petrol again, and holding the Bristol's nose down into a steep dive to enable his 250 h.p. engine to pick up its revs with the least possible delay, he skillfully nursed open the throttle, taking great care not to give the cooling motor too rich a mixture.

"I'm going to see how that monster likes Vickers' lead!" he muttered grimly. "The major's orders were that we were to attack anything and everything that we encountered, and so here goes—that's if I can overtake it,

and find it again in this confounded darkness!"

SLOWLY Mad Carew came back to life again, to experience a familiar sensation that, with a sledgehammer seemingly at work inside his brain, he could not at first accurately interpret.

He tried to move, only to find that he was sitting upright in a confined space, with his arms tightly roped behind his back.

As he moved he felt himself lurching to the right, and this supplied the clue that enabled him to solve what that familiar sensation meant.

He was seated inside a climbing plane.

He listened intently, and a puzzled frown corrugated his aching brows. The vibrations told him that he was aboard a plane of unusually large dimensions, and he was listening for the musical throbbing roar of its engines.

But the only sound that reached to his ears was a faint whistle of propeller blades churning the air.

Slowly Mad Carew forced open his aching eyes. A myriad of bewildered thoughts tumbled through his brain like a troupe of crazy acrobats.

It was as though he had just awakened—not to real life—but into the middle of some crazy and hideous nightmare.

He was seated in a monster cabin, illuminated by a faint bluish light—which gave him the momentarily illusion of being a passenger inside a crowded miniature Tube-train.

The eerie light revealed his fellow-passengers like shadowy beings from another world.

With the exception of Joker Jameson, who was a bound prisoner in the next seat to him, his fellow-travellers upon this amazing, almost incredible air voyage were all dressed in jet-black skin-tights with weird, close-fitting masks completely covering their heads.

Several of these uncanny apparitions were staring straight at him through large, round-peggled goggles—and the bluish light which filled the long cabin came from tiny blue bulbs fitted above the eye-pieces of their close-fitting masks.

So unearthly and weird did these black-encased figures look that Mad Carew might have been tempted to believe that he had been captured by invaders from another planet—had it not been for the modern rifles fitted with saw-bayonets, some of which bore ominous russet-brown stains, which these men were nursing between their knees.

The incredible truth dawned slowly upon Mad Carew's dazed brain.

These were the raiders who had set fire to the Allied dromes, and had massacred the entire personnel of the British, French, and American Squadrons to whom they had belonged.

He was in a cabin, built inside the fuselage of a monster plane; a machine of far greater dimensions than Mad Carew had ever seen before, or had ever imagined in his wildest dreams concerning the development of aeroplanes as a fighting force.

The Germans had built a gigantic troop-carrying aeroplane capable of conveying infantrymen raiders far behind the British lines. The mystery was solved—and the truth was almost as staggering as the mystery itself had been.

The enemy had constructed an aeroplane of such immense size and engine-power that they were able to land armed troops behind the British lines, carry out a lightning raid, and then convey the troops back to Germany again—leaving behind them the impression that the raiders had been spirited away into empty air.

Mad Carew was able to count fully twenty-five of the armed, jet-black raiders sitting tightly packed along the walls of the long, tapering cabin. Dimly in the nose of the giant plane he could see its pilot, in an enclosed glass cockpit, seated behind a large joystick, with a steering-wheel superimposed upon it—looking, in the eerie blue light, like a futurist's impression of the days yet to come.

"Major, what's it all mean? What's happened to us?"

It was Joker Jameson's strained, puzzled voice arising from out of the bluish gloom at his side.

"It means, Joker, that we're being taken alive back to Germany in a plane that's about five times bigger than anything with wings that's ever been used in the war before!" Mad Carew answered grimly. "We've solved the mystery of those ransacked dromes!"

"But, major—the engines!" Joker gasped. "They're silent!"

"Which explains why they've never been picked up by our listening apparatus," Mad Carew replied grimly. "Perhaps, when we reach journey's end, somewhere in Germany, we may get a chance to discover how those engines are being muffled. Purple thunder, though—maybe we won't reach Germany! Look—look, it's one of the Bad Lads!"

Those last words hissed from Mad Carew's lips in a tense whisper. His eyes were glued to the stout glass window in the wall of the cockpit at his side.

A black shape, which was swiftly materialising into a steeply zooming Bristol Fighter, was coming up out of the night beneath the monster plane's tail—like a perky sparrow daring to attack a mighty eagle.

With thinning lips, Joker Jameson realised that it was one of his own pals—bent upon obeying Mad Carew's orders to destroy anything and everything that might be encountered in the night sky.

They were about to be attacked by one of the dauntless pilots of the famous Squadron No. 333—with its tense young war-hawk crouching over his controls, little dreaming that if he destroyed this monster raider he would destroy with it his own fiery but beloved commander, Mad Carew, and Joker Jameson, the popular skipper of C Flight.

Suddenly, spluttering red fire stabbed the darkness from the centre of the Bristol's whirling propeller.

British lead hammered like a devil's tattoo against the giant plane's side, punching jagged holes in its cabin floor.

"Good shooting, lad!" Mad Carew muttered thickly. "Let 'em have it, boy! Bring the perisher down!"

Joker's eyes flashed with a light of fire. He, too, was inwardly hoping that the guns of this dauntless little attacker might bring this monstrous raider crashing down out of the night sky.

Their own death would spell a glorious victory for the famous Squadron No. 333.

A FLAMING COFFIN

THE savage hammer-thud of Vickers lead through the giant troop-carrier's metal sides was the first intimation that the Germans received that a small British plane was daring to challenge their monster raider's supremacy of the skies.

Farther down the long cabin five of the black-clad raiders lurched forward, one after the other, like tumbling Aunt Sallys in a fairground sideshow—riddled by British bullets that were creeping with the relentlessness of an unforgiving fate along the long cabin towards the pilot's enclosed cockpit.

Instinctively Mad Carew and Joker hunched their shoulders and, watching those hammering bullets creeping closer towards them, waited with tensed nerves to feel the sledge-hammer thud of British lead striking home into their own bodies.

It was a strange experience—waiting helplessly aboard an enemy machine for death to be dealt out to them by bullets fired from a British plane.

But, even had it been possible, neither Mad Carew nor Joker would have made their presence known to the dauntless pilot of the British plane, and by so doing, check his heroic attempt to shoot down the monster enemy plane.

The thundering British bullets punched jagged holes through the floor at the two Britishers' feet. One deadly leaden pill snatched like invisible fingers at the cloth of Mad Carew's flying-suit within a few inches of his heart as it whistled beneath his armpit, en route for the cabin roof.

Another grazed the sole of Joker's boot—

and then the deadly stream passed on towards the giant plane's pilot.

But in the nick of time, the German pilot banked the monster plane sharply over.

The Bristol zoomed up past the cabin window so close to it that Mad Carew and Joker were easily able to discern the outline of its pilot's begoggled head. But the black face-mask prevented them from recognising which one of the Bad Lads it was.

Joker's eyes narrowed as he watched the Bristol Fighter winging steeply round in a tight immelman turn.

Who was the masked Bad Lad who was now manoeuvring his machine to again attack the monster German plane? "Baby" Wilson? Tony Bevin? Mike Cotton?

It would be just the sort of cruel trick that Fate would play upon Unlucky Mike—to turn the sweetness of a magnificent victory bitter by the knowledge that in shooting down the giant raider he had killed two of his closest friends!

"When the swinehead attacks again, he dies!"

The words came in a gruff, guttural snarl from a masked figure in a jet-black German officer's uniform, who was seated at a second control column beside the pilot's enclosed cockpit.

He was undoubtedly the officer-in-charge of the raiders—and as he snarled these savage words his hand dropped to the handle of a small lever at his side.

Mad Carew and Joker watched him with fascinated eyes. With horror dawning in their hearts they saw the Bristol Fighter climbing again to resume its attack beneath the monster plane's tail.

Suddenly its twin-Vickers became red-lipped, and two deadly streams of bullets again beat a devil's tattoo upon the flying monster's side.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!
Something resembling a stifled cheer escaped Joker's lips.

"Attaboy, whoever you are!" he gasped excitedly. "She won't survive much of this!"

Those murderous streams of bullets were stitching a line of ominous black holes along the wall of the giant plane, straight towards its gigantic petrol tanks above the pilot's head.

Much more of this and the giant raider would soon be careering earthward, enveloped in a sheet of flames, carrying all on board her to their death.

And then the German officer, with a snarl of rage, jerked over the small lever.

Both Mad Carew and Joker had been instinctively struggling with their bonds in a vain attempt to reach him and prevent him from manipulating that fateful lever.

They stopped dead, with faces tense, as the lever snapped over, and they turned apprehensively to stare through the cabin window.

A gasp of abject horror hissed from Joker's lips; a prickly sensation attacked his skin as though it were being scourged by a million needle-points.

"Purple thunder!" jerked Mad Carew in a horror-charged whisper. "The inhuman devils!"

From a wide barrel, shaped like a torpedo-tube, immediately beneath the monster plane's outspread tail, a number of long steel arrows had been ejected, in such a manner that they swiftly spread in all directions, in the pathway of the attacking Bristol Fighter.

And from the tail of each of the innumerable arrows fluttered a streamer of blazing cloth. Evidently these cloth-trailers had been soaked in petrol, and some form of mechanical contrivance had ignited them as they had been discharged by explosives from the torpedo-tube.

For a moment the night sky in the giant plane's wake was illuminated in a brilliant yellow ball of light.

Spellbound with horror, the two captive Britishers watched the Bristol Fighter zoom straight into that murderous hail of flaming arrows. Tight-lipped, they watched a dozen arrows pierce its wings, and become firmly fixed there with their burning tails whipping the air, and the flicking flames rapidly spreading to the doped fabric.

Other arrows rained down upon the cockpit

and fuselage; within a matter of a few poignant seconds the whole plane became enveloped in roaring flames.

Its masked young pilot stiffened in his cockpit, and his arms rose in the air as he tried for a moment to beat back the snaking tongues of fire around his cockpit.

One of the blazing arrows pierced his shoulder, and he slumped back in the cockpit of the doomed plane.

The next moment, with its wings, fuselage, and tail rapidly being transformed into a glowing, blood-red skeleton, the Bristol Fighter lurched over like a wounded bird, and then plunged earthward, streaking the sky in its wake with a long pennant of fire and smoke.

The last that the two horrified Britishers saw of their doomed pal was a huddled figure, crumpled up in its cockpit, vividly illuminated by the hissing flames of his blazing coffin.

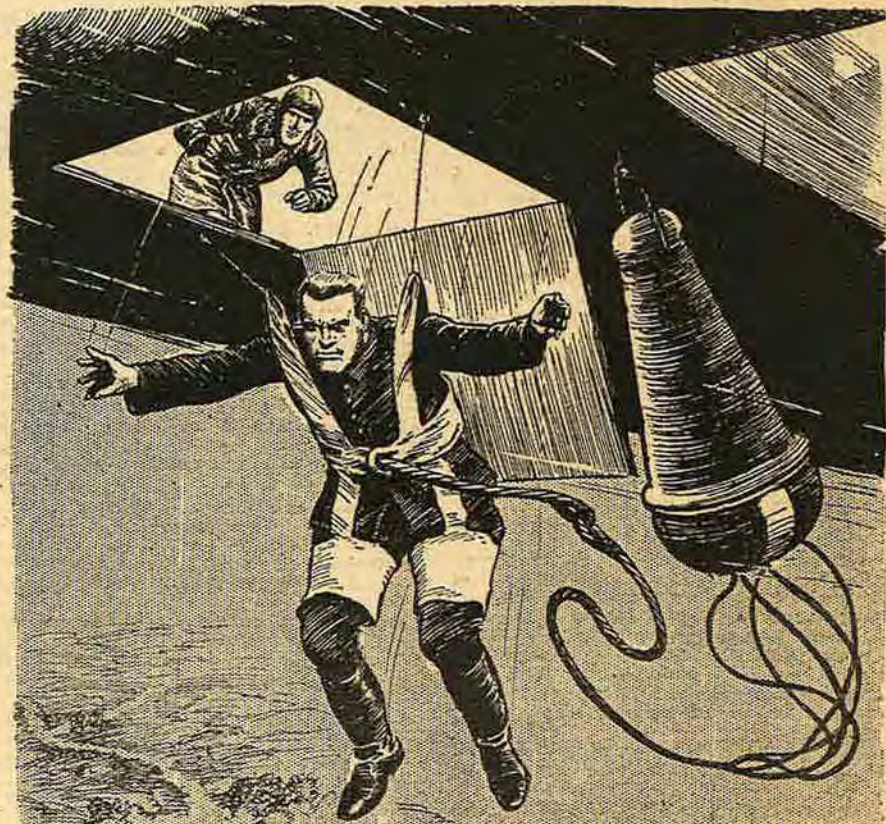
And then the hapless pilot was swallowed up by the cruel flames as the burning Bristol

This is only an experimental machine; soon we shall be building more by mass production."

He lapsed into silence for a moment whilst he cast his birdy eyes proudly down the length of the long cabin.

"Let me describe this magnificent machine to you, my swine guest," he continued. "In the first place the whole of this plane—which incidentally is of my own design, and will eventually become known as the Schaffen troop-carrier—is built of a new metal, called Duncoknite, which is a combination of steel and aluminium, and is as strong as the former and as light as the latter.

"This enables four ordinary engines, made of the same material, to be sufficient to supply all the necessary motive power," Von Schaffen continued. "This machine carries no less than twenty-five passengers. Perhaps the most interesting and useful of all my inventions are the exhaust mufflers—which have taken me over three years to bring to their present state of efficiency. With their aid we are able to fly on a dark night at a normal altitude over



Mad Carew turned just in time to see Baron von Schaffen vanishing, feet-first, through a trap-door like aperture in the floor of the cabin. The German had dropped straight into a parachute-fixed to the underside fuselage.

Fighter lanced downward through the darkness like a blazing torch flung from a giant's ruthless hand.

On to their horrified ears rang a brutal laugh.

The German officer had risen to his feet and was lurching down the narrow cabin towards them.

"Well, Mad Carew, how do you like seeing one of your young fledglings go down in flames?" he sneered. "And that is the fate which awaits any verdamnter hunds of the Allies who are foolish enough to attack us."

Mad Carew's lips curled with savage anger.

"That's what you hope, eh?" he cried fiercely. "But this giant plane isn't immune to British bullets!"

The German officer laughed harshly.

"You under-estimate my invention, Herr Carew," he leered. "Oh, yah, I, Baron von Schaffen, invented this monster of the sky

your lines without fear of being either seen or heard."

Mad Carew, despite his attempts to keep his feelings under control, caught his breath in his throat.

"I see that you realise the possibilities, Herr Major," Von Schaffen sneered. "So far we have confined our activities to landing close to some Allied aerodrome, and then launching an unexpected attack upon it, wiping out its entire personnel with the aid of daggers, bayonets, and poison gas, and then setting fire to its hangers."

"These are in the nature of experimental raids. Ultimately whole flights of these giant planes will be constructed, and that will enable us to land huge parties of fighting troops far behind your lines, and launch a surprise attack upon any objective that we may consider to be worthy of our attention. For example, one thousand armed raiders could be easily landed close to your C.H.Q., and before an alarm could be raised your general-in-chief could be

either assassinated or captured. A few raids like that, eh, mein herr, and the war would soon be won for Germany, I think."

Mad Carew's blood seemed to turn as if to ice in his veins. Each word sliced into his brain like a sword-stab.

Perhaps it was the voice of a madman that he was listening to—but it was also the voice of cold, merciless, and unrelenting death.

Baron von Schaffen had already proved with what ghastly results this new and terrible weapon could be used—supposing they did manufacture these planes on a gigantic scale!

The blood throbbed against Mad Carew's temples. If only he could do something! Perhaps if he could destroy this monster plane with Von Schaffen on board, then the Germans would never be able to build their monstrous fleet of gigantic troop-carriers.

But how could he get free and turn the tables on the ruthless Baron von Schaffen? How? How? How?

AT THE POINT OF A PISTOL

THE monster plane slid silently down to a smooth landing, and Mad Carew and Joker were released from their bonds and marched, with the needle-sharp points of trench-knives sticking into their backs, from the cabin, by the black-clad raiders.

Still Mad Carew was turning over in his mind a number of wild plans for making a sudden dash for liberty in the hope of being able to set fire to the monster plane, and then snatching up a gun from somewhere and putting a bullet through the fiendishly ingenious brain of Baron von Schaffen.

But as Mad Carew stepped out from a door in the giant plane's wall, and descended a short flight of portable wooden steps, a great sound of rushing air reached to his ears.

He would gain nothing by destroying this monster plane! It was not the only one!

There was another giant plane swishing down like a gigantic vulture from out of the night sky.

Dozens upon dozens of oil-pot flares illuminated the flying field with their flickering glow.

By their light Mad Carew caught his first glimpse of the homes that had been built for these monsters—gigantic hangars as large as Zeppelin sheds.

And then his breath caught in his throat. Upon the wide stretch of tarmac in front of these sheds there were two more monster planes. They were so gigantic in proportion that a number of Fokker D.VIII's standing near by looked like child's toys in comparison, and the mechanics swarming over them were dwarfed into looking like midges and ants clambering about the wings of some gigantic prehistoric bird.

Then there were four of these planes—airial transports years ahead of everything else in design!

All four had evidently just returned from the night raid upon the British back-areas. Each plane had carried at least twenty-five rifle-and-knife-armed raiders.

Little wonder then that four complete Allied squadrons had been massacred during the past four nights.

Baron von Schaffen paused with a mocking laugh at the two Britishers' side.

"You see my other little toys, hein?" he sneered. "Yes, there are four of them in all! And so you see, mein herr, even if one of my monster planes was destroyed, and I with it, our Air Force could still copy the remainder, and produce the Van Schaffen Air Armada in my memory. You will now be allowed to rest—and sleep if you wish—for a few hours. I shall not require you again until an hour before dawn."

Mad Carew and Joker were cast into a small pillbox-shaped prison possessing walls and doors of reinforced concrete, and one small, heavily barred window.

Joker was about to make a despairing remark to Mad Carew when suddenly he stopped dead, listening intently.

The musical purr of an approaching aero-engine had come down clearly on to the two prisoners' ears.

"Listen, major!" he whispered hoarsely.

"That's a Bristol Fighter, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"It certainly is, Jameson," Mad Carew answered eagerly. "One at least of the Bad Lads has followed the giant raiders home."

The Germans had evidently heard it, too, for through the little window, Mad Carew saw shadowy figures racing about the drome, rapidly extinguishing the oil-pot flares.

Rapid orders were barked in guttural German; but now the drone of the British plane had vanished.

"Either he's landed at the other end of the field with a dead engine," Mad Carew hissed, "or else he's turned and headed back for home."

His words were interrupted by the sudden savage rattle of a machine-gun, and then the deep-throated roar of an engine. The next moment a terrific crash and a staccato explosion rent the air.

Through the window of their small prison Mad Carew and Joker had seen a Bristol Fighter race at almost ground level across the flying field and then crash into a corner of a towering chateau. Now the wreckage was blazing furiously, and from out of the roaring flames there momentarily protruded a crumpled wing bearing a red-white-and-blue ringed symbol upon its scorched and blackened canvas.

"Number two, Joker!" Mad Carew muttered sadly. "This is a bad night for Squadron No. 333!"

SEVERAL hours later the two prisoners from the window of their tiny cell watched German soldiers dressed in black skin-tights and hideous face-masks, and armed with rifles and knives, file aboard three of the monster planes, to be a short while later carried away up into the dark night sky.

"They're going out on another raid, major," Joker gasped. "Two in one night."

The rattle of keys reached to their ears. The door of their prison was thrown open and a party of armed Germans entered.

By the light of hurricane lanterns the two Britishers' arms were lashed to their side, above the elbow, leaving their hands free for limited movement, and then they were marched to the tarmac, and forced once again to enter the cabin of the remaining giant plane.

This time, when the monster plane rose smoothly up towards the night sky, there were no troops aboard, only the pilot, a navigator, two scowling brutal-faced under-officers—and the Baron von Schaffen.

No word was spoken to the two prisoners until long after the pilot had pulled over a lever to muffle the engines, and the plane had penetrated for several miles into the British back-areas.

"We are going down low, swinehead-major," Von Schaffen snarled. "Look through the window—you will recognise the ground below, I think!"

Mad Carew peered downward into the inky darkness. Gradually the ground took shape beneath them.

He caught sight of a lake, and then a small copse, then a cluster of ruined, shell-shattered houses that he had seen from the sky many hundreds of times.

They were circling at a low altitude over the countryside in the immediate vicinity of Squadron No. 333's aerodrome.

Suddenly in an open field, which Mad Carew recognised as being some two miles distant from Squadron No. 333's flying field, he espied three monster black-winged shapes.

They were the Von Schaffen troop-carriers, each of them motionless like gigantic birds of prey, and each one disgorging black-robed raiders armed with rifles and murderous knives.

So a raid was being launched against Squadron No. 333! Well, all that the assassins would find at that flying field were its mechanics, and Fred Fenton and the M.O.

Every other one of the Bad Lads still left in the land of the living would be flying

about the night sky in accordance with Mad Carew's orders.

At a sign from Von Schaffen, Mad Carew and Joker were dragged to their feet by the two burly under-officers, and forced, at the point of murderous knives, to walk towards a small open window in the centre of the long, dark cabin.

The giant plane had circled and was now climbing gradually.

Von Schaffen approached them with a heavy Luger service revolver in one hand. Flashing on an electric torch, he illuminated a bracket secured to the wall, containing a Very Light pistol and an array of coloured flares.

With a murderous glint in his eyes he raised the revolver until the muzzle was pointing straight at the centre of Mad Carew's forehead.

"Major Carew, you are about to die—unless you are prepared to purchase your life at a certain price," he said quietly. "We are now flying immediately above your own flying field. Twice to-night members of your squadron have been guilty of meddlesome interference. True that both of those pilots had paid for their impudence with their lives, but nevertheless they have annoyed me, and I had decided to wipe out the entire squadron."

"You mean mass murder, eh, you fiend?" Mad Carew snapped.

Von Schaffen shrugged his shoulders.

"Call it what you will—but all is fair in war," he retorted. "I happen to know that if we raid your flying field now we should find few, if any, of your pilots at home. They are circling around, searching the sky vainly for my planes, which are so well camouflaged that it is highly improbable that any of them will see us. There is undoubtedly a certain flare signal, known to them all, which would summon them back home. If you wish to save your own life, and spend the rest of the war in a German internment camp, then you will select the necessary flares from this collection, and fire them at once, through this window. I need scarcely warn you that any attempt at trickery would spell certain death for yourself!"

Mad Carew's lips curled with contempt.

"And do you think, you spineless rat, that I would buy my life at that price?" he cried fiercely.

"It is your life, not mine, that is up for sale," Von Schaffen said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "What do you say, Herr Jameson—that is the name, I think? You, too, would know the signal; would you stand there and watch me blow out the brains of your squadron-commander when a word from you could save his life? It will not be nice to remember, for the rest of your days, that the brave Mad Carew died because of you!"

Cold beads of perspiration broke out upon Joker Jameson's brows. It was true that he knew the signal that would bring all the Bad Lads racing back to their home drome.

But must he sacrifice the life of the man who meant more to him perhaps than any other man, in order to save his own pals from being massacred?

Perhaps, if he spoke the words that would save Mad Carew's life, the Bad Lads would see the raiders in time to put up a fight against them, and repel their murderous assault.

But even as this thought flashed across his mind Joker knew that, after what had happened at the other four Allied dromes, he could not run the risk of jeopardising the lives of all the Bad Lads to save their beloved squadron-leader—even though he knew that it would be their wish that he should do so.

"You will, of course, remain silent, Lieutenant Jameson!" Mad Carew spoke the words in a quiet, calm voice.

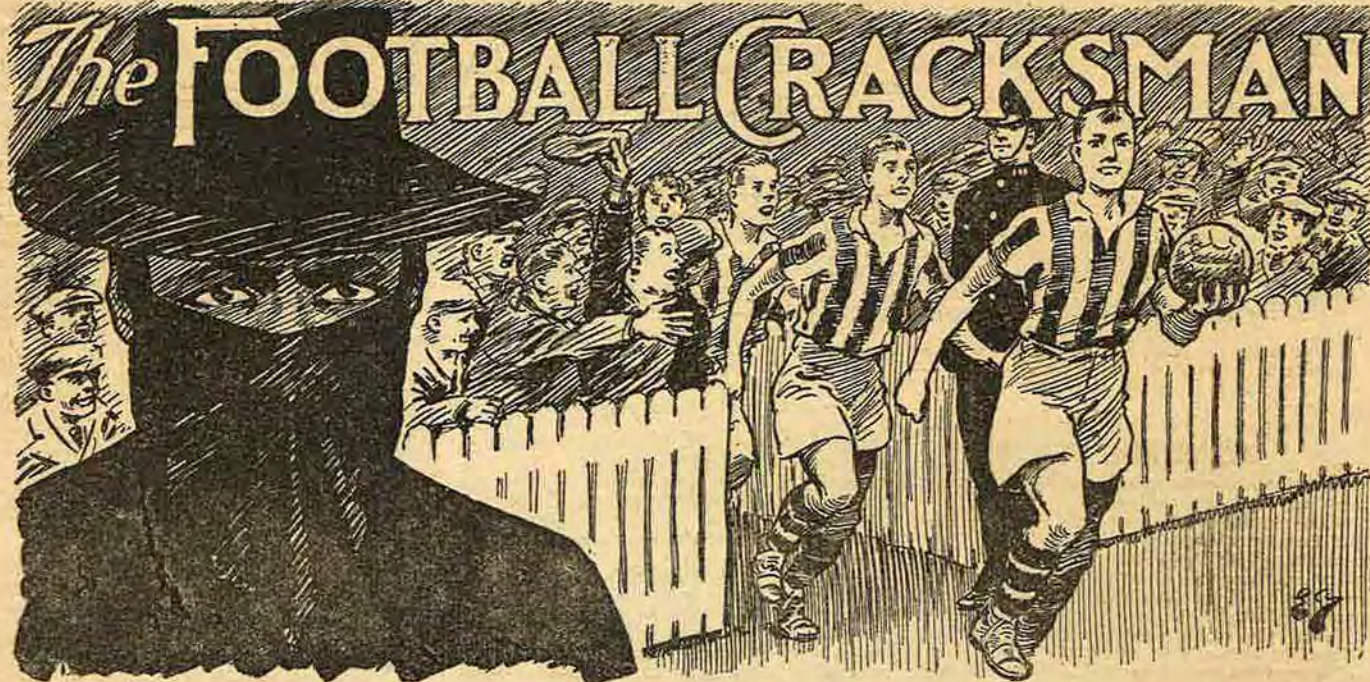
But the next moment the dynamic little major had difficulty to suppress a violent start of mingled amazement and joy.

The blade of a sharp knife had been pressed against the ropes behind the centre of his back, and those ropes were dropping loosely down his body, leaving his arms free!

And then, to his abject amazement, he felt

(Continued on page 14.)

READ HOW BLACK MASK ROBBED THE MUSEUM WHILE IT WAS SURROUNDED BY POLICE



STEVE'S ALIBI

"YOU can't do it, Steve! It's crazy! You'll be caught the moment you step out of this house. Every policeman in town is looking for you!"

The distracted warning brought a reckless gleam into the eyes of Steve Bradshaw, the popular skipper and centre-forward of Milton Rovers, the famous First Division football club.

The warning was uttered by Sam Harris, the Rovers' trainer. Sam was the only man who knew that Steve Bradshaw—for secret reasons of his own—had turned cracksmen.

"You're crazy!" the trainer repeated. "I'm telling you, you'll walk slap into the arms of Inspector Collins, and he'd ask for nothing better than to be able to prove that you're Black Mask—the crook who's been making rings round the police in this town!"

Steve favoured his nervous pal with a daredevil grin, and then went calmly on with his task of laying out the black clothes and hat, the mask, and the black cotton gloves which he wore when he adopted his role of Black Mask, the mystery cracksmen.

Steve knew that Inspector Collins strongly suspected him of being the notorious Black Mask. But, so far, the inspector had been unable to gain a single atom of evidence to prove his suspicions.

Steve had been too cute for him.

In his disguise as Black Mask, Steve had been framed for a murder that he had never committed by a gang of crooks who were out to ruin the Rovers.

If Steve should be caught it would seal his fate, for he had no proof of his innocence.

But Steve didn't mean to be caught.

Sam Harris uttered a wail of protest.

"If you'd really made up your mind to burgle the museum to-night, you might at least have kept quiet about it until the job was done!" he pointed out. "Why did you have to go and telephone Collins and tell him what you were going to do?"

Steve uttered a genial laugh.

With a reckless impudence that was characteristic of him, he had telephoned to Inspector Collins, warning him that, between ten o'clock and midnight that night, Black Mask would raid the local museum, and steal a pair of china dogs from a case of exhibits.

It was a challenge that the inspector could not afford to ignore. Also, it looked like a golden opportunity to lay hands on Black

Mask when he was in the very act of committing a fresh crime.

It certainly seemed as though, at last, the daring cracksmen had over-reached himself.

The inspector had placed a pair of detectives to watch Steve's house, with orders to shadow him the moment he set foot outside the door.

He had also placed a cordon of police round the museum, and had had the gates locked and guarded.

As a final precaution, the inspector himself was at that very moment inside the museum, seated in a chair alongside the threatened exhibits, and vowing that he was not going to take his eyes from them until midnight was safely past.

It seemed as though the football cracksmen had set himself an impossible task.

"Sammy, my lad, I will explain," Steve promised lightly. "Our suspicious friend, Inspector Collins, insists that I am Black Mask, even though he can't prove it. So if Black Mask robs the museum to-night, and I can satisfy the inspector that I haven't set foot outside the house all the time, he'll have to apologise to me, won't he?"

The trainer gaped at him.

"Now I know you're crazy!" he declared. "You can't burgle the museum and stay home all night at the same time—not unless you have figured out a way of being in two places at once!"

Steve chuckled happily.

"Perhaps I've done just that, Sammy," he said lightly.

He sauntered to the window and looked out. In the street below a man lounged under the lamplight. He had been there all the evening. He was one of Inspector Collins' men, and he had orders to watch the house, and to follow Steve if he made any attempt to leave the house.

Steve chuckled, and went through to the bath-room at the back. In the alley behind the house another detective was pacing restlessly up and down.

As the light went on in the bath-room his head went up suspiciously, as if he was afraid that Steve was about to make a bolt for it by the back way.

Steve stepped back from the window, and his eyes went thoughtfully round the room. He lifted a bottle from a shelf, and handed it to the trainer.

"Slip that in your pocket," Steve instructed.

"You'll be needing it shortly."

The trainer looked at the bottle in surprise.

"What's in it?" he asked.

"Some of the powder the doctor gave me, that time when I couldn't get any sleep after I broke my collar-bone in that match with the United," Steve reminded him.

The trainer obediently put the bottle in his pocket. Full of bewilderment, he followed Steve into the living-room.

Steve glanced at the clock. The time was a quarter to nine. Steve opened the front of the clock, and pushed the hands on an hour. Then he went down and opened the street door, and walked out to the gate.

The watching detective eyed him suspiciously.

"Good-evening!" Steve greeted pleasantly. He was answered with a surly growl.

"Wouldn't you prefer to come inside?" Steve suggested jauntily. "It's terribly cold out there! You must be frozen stiff!"

The detective gave a violent start.

"I don't think I know what you're talking about!" he muttered.

Steve chuckled.

"Inspector Collins has got a bee in his bonnet," he smiled blandly. "He seems to imagine that I'm a dangerous crook, and he's put you here to keep an eye on me!"

The detective's tone became less surly.

"I'm only obeying orders, Mr. Bradshaw," he contended. "I've been told—"

"To watch me, and follow if I go out," beamed Steve. "I know. So why not come and sit beside my fire? You can watch much more comfortably from there!"

The detective hesitated suspiciously.

"I don't get the idea," he said cautiously. "What's your game?"

"I'll be honest with you," said Steve with disarming candour. "Inspector Collins has made up his mind that I'm this crook they call Black Mask. If Black Mask pulls off a crime somewhere to-night, the inspector is bound to imagine that, in some miraculous way, I've slipped out of the house while your back was turned. But if we both sit beside the fire I'll have an alibi!"

The impostor's watch-dog rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"There's certainly something in that," he admitted.

Steve grabbed his arm and hustled him along, giving him no further chance to hesitate or back out of the arrangement.

Steve piloted him inside. As the pair came in, Sam Harris' jaw dropped, and he looked ready to sink through the floor with amazement and horror.

Sam, having once done a spell in prison, had a deep and abiding dislike for all policemen. He couldn't have been more horrified if Steve had brought a healthy python into the house.

Steve beamed pleasantly, ignoring Sam's outraged looks.

"Sammy, we've got a visitor," he announced. "Draw an armchair up to the fire for Mr.—er—"

"Barlow," supplied the detective.

The disgruntled trainer moved up behind Steve and hissed out of the corner of his mouth:

"You hopeless maniac! Aren't we having enough trouble with the cops without you inviting one of the dirty blighters into the house?"

"He's my alibi, Sammy," Steve whispered back.

Steve drew his chair up to the fire on the opposite side to the detective.

"Do you play chess, Mr. Barlow?" he asked pleasantly.

The detective admitted modestly that he played a moderate game. Steve produced a board and a box of chessmen, and they began a game with Sam standing over the board and watching the game.

After a while the clock, which Steve had put forward an hour, struck ten.

Barlow looked up in astonishment. He stared at the clock, then pulled out his watch, and compared it. According to his watch it was only nine.

"Are you sure your clock's right?" he asked.

"It was dead right by the radio time signal at six o'clock, and it keeps very good time," Steve assured him innocently.

"By Jove, I had no idea it was so late! Must have forgotten to wind my watch," exclaimed Barlow. "I'll be going off duty in another hour's time."

He gave the watch a few turns of the winder, carefully advanced the hands an hour, and slipped it back into his pocket.

They settled down to their chess.

Half an hour later, when the situation on the board was getting complicated and tense, Steve suddenly looked at the clock again.

"Half-past ten, Sam," he said. "Time for you to make our coffee. Bring a cup for Mr. Barlow, too."

Sam gave him a baffled look, scratched his head, and backed out into the kitchen. He could be heard making a clatter with the crockery.

Steve jumped to his feet. "Excuse me," he said. "I must go and see what he is doing."

He went into the kitchen, where the trainer, slightly dazed like a man who had been hit behind the ear with a club, was mechanically preparing coffee for the three of them.

He looked at Steve wild-eyed.

Steve tapped his pocket.

"Give me the powder," he whispered quietly.

"Huh?" gulped Sam dizzily.

"The sleeping powder," Steve insisted.

The trainer hauled the bottle from his pocket. Steve took a measured quantity in a spoon and dumped it into one of the cups.

"See that Barlow gets that cup," he instructed. "For goodness' sake don't bungle it."

Steve went back to the chess game. A few moments later Sam Harris came in with the coffee and handed it round.

Steve and his pal exchanged sly glances as the detective first sipped, then drained, his cup.

"That's the best coffee I've tasted for a long time," he declared.

Steve pushed a pawn up the board.

"Your move, and you're in check," he said.

The detective leaned over the board to study the positions of the pieces. It was a ticklish situation. The game had reached a critical stage, and if he made a false move he would be checkmated and beaten.

He rubbed his chin with his thumb in a pondering gesture. He tilted his head to study the board from a fresh angle. He reached out and touched his king, was about to move it, then thought better of it.

He grinned sheepishly as he realised that Steve had got him into a tight corner.

He combed his hair worriedly with his fingers. He stared unwinkingly at the board for the best part of a minute.

Then he smothered a yawn, and rubbed his eyes.

"I'm beginning to feel sh-shleepy," he admitted in a woolly voice.

"The heat of the fire makes anyone sleepy," said Steve casually.

Then he yawned noisily.

Sam yawned, too.

The detective blinked owlishly. This yawning was catching.

He leaned his head back against the top of the chair and yawned so gustily that Steve and Sam stared at him in fascination, wondering how his jaws kept together.

The detective closed his eyes and smeared his hand across them.

"Sh-funny," he mumbled. "Come over tired all at wunsh, all a' wu—"

His head flopped on one side, and he began to snore.

Steve looked at him for several seconds in suspense-filled, breathless silence. Then he rose softly to his feet, and struck a match just in front of the detective's eyelids. He did not flinch.

Steve calmly blew the match out and tossed it in the fire.

Then he grinned at the trainer.

"He's out like a log," he declared with satisfaction. "I'll have to write that doctor a testimonial. He certainly puts up a nice line in sleeping powders."

He went softly into his bed-room. When he reappeared a few minutes later he was dressed from head to foot in sombre black, the outfit he wore for his daring exploits as a cracksmen.

He nodded at the snoring detective.

"Keep an eye on him, Sammy," he advised. "The dose I gave him should hold him quiet for an hour, at least. I ought to be back before then."

Sam's eyes mirrored his anxiety as he watched his daredevil companion walk jauntily to the door.

"But suppose you don't get back before he wakes up? What then?" he asked.

In the doorway Steve paused and looked back.

Beneath the black mask that concealed his eyes his lips were curved in a reckless smile.

"In that case you'd better telephone the police station," he suggested lightly, "because I'll be in gaol!"

HOW BLACK MASK DID IT

STEVE'S black, crouching figure was a dark, shapeless shadow as he lurked at a corner of the square of steel railings enclosing the shrubbery that surrounded the museum.

The main entrance to the museum was a hundred yards away and the gates were locked.

Given time and left to himself Steve would have had no trouble in forcing the locks, but Inspector Collins had put a constable on guard.

His only way in was over the railings, each of which ended in a sharp, formidable-looking spike.

Steve listened tensely. He could hear movements in the dark shrubbery, and knew that it was being patrolled by the inspector's men.

He waited until the sounds of movement made by the watchers began to recede to another part of the grounds. Then he set about his task of getting over the first obstacle, the high iron railings.

The ugly looking spikes would have daunted any ordinary burglar, for a single slip while climbing over might be the cause of a fatal injury.

But Steve had come prepared.

From his pocket he took a number of large bung corks. Raising himself on tiptoe, he reached upwards and impaled the corks on top of the spikes.

He grasped two of the railings firmly. With a lithe leap, he swung himself upwards. With

muscles tensed, he hauled himself higher until his chin was level with the row of spikes.

He hunched his shoulders, gave a convulsive squirm, and got the edge of his elbow across the protecting corks.

The rest was easier as he got his waist across the top and swung his legs over to drop silently into the shrubbery, but his hat-band was damp with sweat by the time that he was safely inside.

He drew his gun and pushed branches aside with an outstretched hand as he crept cautiously through the shrubs.

The steps of a patrolling constable crunched on a narrow path. Steve melted back into the shadows as the unsuspecting constable went by.

A few paces farther on the constable paused and looked to left and right among the shadows.

Steve moved out of hiding. On tiptoe, with cat-like stealth, he approached the constable from behind until he could look over the man's shoulder.

Even then, thanks to the silence of Steve's approach, the constable did not realise that he was not alone.

Steve craned his neck forward. His lips came close to the constable's ear. Softly and distinctly he whispered:

"Boo!"

With a smothered gasp of alarm the constable whirled, clawing for his whistle, to find himself staring straight into the menacing muzzle of Steve's gun.

Without hesitation, Steve struck with speed and accuracy.

He used the barrel of the gun to swipe the constable under the chin. It was a knock-out blow.

As the constable sagged at the knees, Steve hurriedly grabbed him under the armpits and lowered him slowly to the ground, to prevent any noise.

Steve towed his victim into the shadow of the shrubbery and went to work swiftly.

At top speed the unconscious constable was stripped of his cape and uniform, and a few minutes later he was helplessly gagged and bound under the shelter of a bush.

Steve took off his black clothes and donned the police uniform. He made a bundle of his discarded clothing and stowed it out of sight in a fork formed by two leafy branches.

Then he scooped up some dirt and smeared it over his face. Then he clapped the helmet on his head and jumped out on to the path.

He sprinted towards the main doors of the museum, with the police whistle between his lips.

Pheecep! Pheecep!

Steve blew shrill blasts as he raced up the broad steps of the entrance. Hubbub broke loose as the screeching warning shattered the expectant silence.

He raced across the vestibule, brushing aside the queries of an excited curator.

"Outside, sir!" he rapped. "Quick as you can!"

When he plunged into one of the museum galleries he was dabbing at his dirt-streaked face with a big handkerchief which obscured most of the lower part of his features that would have been visible beneath the helmet.

He was entering on the boldest and most reckless phase of his enterprise. There was no drawing back. If he was recognised it would be all up with him.

His heart thumped excitedly when he caught sight of his old enemy, Inspector Collins.

The inspector was sitting stolidly in a chair in front of the showcase that Steve had vowed to rob. His face lost some of its rigid look as Steve came pelting in.

"What's going on?" rapped Collins.

"Black Mask, inspector!" gasped Steve. "He's been seen out in the grounds!"

The inspector leaped to his feet with a roar.

"The dickens he has!" he thundered.

"How did he manage to get this far?"

Steve held the handkerchief to his face, dabbing at his nose.

"Had a bit of a scrap with him myself," he mumbled. "He got away."

The inspector hesitated, then lunged towards the door.

"Stay here!" he instructed curtly. "Keep your eye on that pair of china dogs! Don't move till I come back!"

He went sprinting out into the grounds. Immediately he had gone, Steve went to work on the showcase with a jemmy and ripped the top open. It was the work of a moment to transfer the two china dogs to his pocket.

Then he raced through the galleries and down the steps.

Dim figures moved about in the dark. Torches flashed. He could hear the fog-horn tones of Inspector Collins, urging his men to hurry and lay the Black Mask by the heels.

Steve plunged through the shrubbery. He unrolled the constable's cape. He put the whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast. Then he yelled:

"There he goes—over the railings!" He hurled the cape into the air. It soared above the railings, a shapeless, flapping mass against the sky which might easily be mistaken in the excitement for a leaping man.

The cape vanished. It had lodged in the overhanging branches of a tree.

Police raced towards the gates. Collins' voice was blaring:

"Hurry! Hurry! He's getting away!" The gates opened with a crash. Constables pounded along the pavement. More whistles shrilled. Then came the rasping roar of a police car being revved up as it shot away from the kerb.

Gradually all the hubbub died away in the distance. Quietly Steve retrieved his bundle of black clothes.

BLACK MASK'S REAL ENEMY

STEVE was grinning jauntily as he entered his house.

Detective Barlow still slept by the fire. Sam Harris eyed Steve anxiously.

"I was beginning to get scared!" he gulped. "Did everything go off all right?"

With a quiet smile Steve nodded, then went into his bedroom and changed into his ordinary clothes.

Then he returned to the living-room. The clock, which he had put forward an hour before inviting Barlow inside, was pointing to half-past eleven. He put the hands back to half-past ten.

Then he lightly fingered the sleeping detective's vest-pocket and drew out his watch. He moved the hands back to the proper time, to coincide with the altered clock, then tucked the watch back in place.

The detective grunted in his sleep and stirred restlessly.

Steve settled in his chair before the chess-board, and kicked the fire-irons over with a loud clatter.

As he stooped to pick them up, Barlow roused himself with a start.

"Sorry if I scared you!" grinned Steve. Barlow gave him a startled look. He grinned in a sickly fashion.

"I believe I almost went to sleep," he confessed drowsily.

"I believe you almost did," Steve smiled back at him, and glanced up at the clock. "Never mind. You'll be off duty in less than half an hour."

Bang, bang, bang! Steve smiled softly to himself as the crashing of the door-knocker echoed through the house.

That, he felt sure, would be Inspector Collins.

He was right. A few moments later the inspector came charging into the room. He glared furiously at Barlow.

"What the dickens are you doing in here?" he demanded thickly.

The detective looked huffed.

"Mr. Bradshaw invited me," he explained. "I accepted the invitation because my orders were to keep watch on Mr. Bradshaw, and I thought that he couldn't pull any funny stuff if I was in the room with him all the time."

"Ha! So it was Bradshaw's idea, was it?"

snorted the inspector suspiciously. "How long have you been here?"

"About three-quarters of an hour," said the detective, with a glance at the clock.

"Three—What time did Bradshaw go out? And how long was he gone?" snarled the inspector.

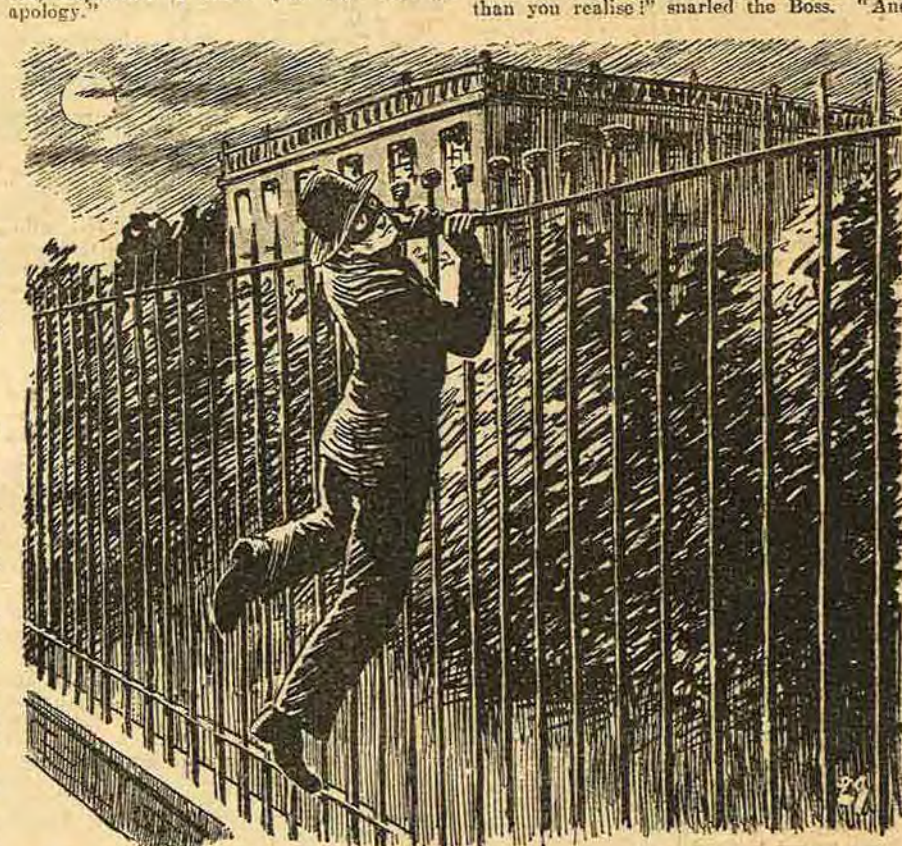
"He didn't go out," said the detective confidently.

"Didn't go out?" yelled Collins. "But he must have done. He—"

"Quietly, inspector—quietly!" purred Steve. "Would you mind telling us just what it is that's worrying you?"

"Black Mask robbed the Milton Museum less than half an hour ago!" snarled Collins savagely. "He stole a pair of china dogs that once belonged to your father, Bradshaw."

"And you've been insisting all along that I was Black Mask!" said Steve sadly. "Tch, tch, inspector! I think you owe me an apology."



From his pocket Black Mask took a number of large bung corks. Raising himself on tip-toe, he reached upwards and impaled the corks on the top of the spikes. Though police waited for him inside and outside the museum, the Football Cracksman intended to commit the crime he had promised to commit.

The inspector glared in baffled fury.

Either he was completely wrong, and Steve Bradshaw was not Black Mask, or else he was bamboozled in a manner that was beyond his understanding.

He jerked his chin at the detective, and started to clump out of the room. At the door he paused and turned.

"I'll be seeing you again, Bradshaw!" he promised darkly.

"Sure!" beamed Steve pleasantly. "Drop in any time you're passing!"

"SO Black Mask has done it again!"

The mysterious criminal known as the Boss, leader of the gang of crooks that was out to ruin the Rovers, spat out the words with vicious anger.

With a snarl, he crushed up the copy of the local newspaper in which he had been reading an account of Black Mask's latest and most daring exploit.

He gazed round the room with angry, glittering eyes.

This was the gang's hideout.

Three men in shirtsleeves were playing cards over by the window.

A sleek, wasp-waisted youth was sitting on a rumpled bed, carefully oiling a revolver.

The Boss glared at his men.

"From now on the gloves are off!" he snapped. "The time's come for a show-down! We've got to get Black Mask, and we've got to do it quick before he has time to wreck our racket!"

The sleek youth shrugged.

"Aw, you've got it wrong, chief!" he declared. "The way I see it, this Black Mask is just a screwpot. Look! He raids the museum, where he could have lifted stuff worth thousands. And what does he take? Just a couple of goofy china dogs! Nuts! Let Inspector Collins handle him!"

"Those two dogs are more important to us than you realise!" snarled the Boss. "And

as for Inspector Collins, that dim-witted ox couldn't catch Black Mask in a thousand years! We've got to do the job ourselves!"

"O.K.!" shrugged the other. "Tell me who Black Mask is, and I'll bump him off for you, chief!"

"I don't know who he is," admitted the Boss. "Nobody knows. But we're going to set a trap for him. And we're going to strike a knock-out blow at the Rovers at the same time. Two birds with one stone—see?"

"Shoot the works, chief!" drawled the gunman.

"I've got it all doped out," declared the Boss. "On Saturday afternoon the Rovers play a home match against Fairfax Town. That's when we strike. My plan's fool-proof. It means good-bye to Black Mask!"

New foes are on Steve Bradshaw's trail now! Does he know about them? And will he be able to deal with them as successfully as he does with Inspector Collins? Don't miss next Tuesday's chapters of this fine story! Does your newsagent know you want TRIUMPH every week?

MAD CAREW'S DAWN PATROL

(Continued from page 10.)

the butt of a revolver being pressed into the fingers of his right hand from out of the darkness at his back.

Mad Carew could not even blindly guess at an explanation to this staggering occurrence, but he made use of the opportunity that it offered him with typical promptitude and speed.

His left arm shot up and struck the gun in Von Schaffen's hand to one side, and then he jabbed the muzzle of the revolver home into the German's ribs.

"Drop that gun!" he barked. "One move and you're a dead man!"

"And that applies to anyone in this plane!"

Mad Carew could scarcely believe his ears as those fiercely barked words in an unmistakably boyish voice rang through the cabin of the giant plane.

It was the voice of Fred Fenton, the youngster whom he had told to remain behind at the squadron drome and report sick to the M.O.

Fred Fenton swiftly released Joker Jameson, and Mad Carew passed the German inventor's revolver into the young flight-commander's fingers.

"Take charge of the pilot and navigator, Jameson," Mad Carew rapped. "And look around for a suitable landing ground. Now, Fenton, perhaps you'll explain what the purple thunder you're doing here, and how you got here?"

"I hated the thought of being left behind, major, as if I was afraid to do my job with the rest of the chaps," Fred Fenton gulped. "As soon as everyone had gone, I scrounged a motor-bike and followed Joker and you to the American drome. I arrived there just in time to see you being overpowered and carried off to these giant planes. I rushed back to our own drome and took-off in a Bristol, and by a stroke of luck I was able to trail one of these monsters back to their drome in Germany."

"I didn't dare to try to shoot the plane down because I feared that it might be the one that you both were on board. When I reached the German drome, I landed at one end of it and then staged a crash so that the Hun should think that I'd been killed—"

"Clever work, Fenton!" Mad Carew barked. "And then what?"

"I can speak a bit of German, sir," Fred Fenton continued. "And I was lucky enough to overhear Von Schaffen relating his plans to attack the Squadron No. 333 flying field to his pilot; and so I decided to try to smuggle myself aboard this plane, in the hope of being able to do something to help you. I hid myself in a sort of signaller's cabin just behind the pilot. Oh, and sir, I discovered that there are signal lights under the fuselage of this plane, and I sent a Morse Code message whilst we were circling above our drome, telling what was happening. It was read by someone down there, because I received a 'message down' signal back."

"Oh, stout work indeed, young 'un!" Mad Carew cried warmly. "MacTavish will have read the message and he will now be sending through to the nearest infantry battalion for support. By the time your raiders, Von Schaffen, reach my flying field, there'll be a warm reception awaiting them. Right, I'll send that signal for you now; it will lure your raiders into launching their attack."

A baffled snarl rang from Von Schaffen's lips as Mad Carew turned towards the flare cabinet.

And then, even as Mad Carew sent the "return home" signal arcing out through the small window a warning, startled shout rang from Joker's lips.

Mad Carew swung round just in time to see Baron von Schaffen vanishing, feet-first, through a trapdoor-like aperture in the floor of the cabin.

Dashing to the trapdoor, he saw a parachute opening in the wake of the giant plane, with Baron von Schaffen swinging beneath it.

"Purple thunder, that's fiendishly clever!" Mad Carew gasped. "A sort of escape device; I suppose he dropped straight into a parachute-harness fixed to the underside of the fuselage, immediately beneath that trapdoor. Right, Jameson, we'll go down; tell that pilot to land us in the same field that the other troop-carriers have landed in!"

THE giant plane slid noiselessly down to a smooth landing. In the darkness Mad Carew could just see the gigantic, outspread wings of the motionless and deserted troop-carriers.

"Take the navigator and pilot to the nearest camp, and have them safely locked up," he instructed Joker and Fred Fenton. "Then make your way to our flying field; I'll join you as soon as I've made these planes so that they can't be taken back into the air again."

The two young pilots took their departure with their two prisoners, and Mad Carew was just about to re-enter the giant plane when suddenly a thunderous explosion rent the air.

He instinctively threw himself flat to the ground as a great ball of flame and smoke mushroomed up into the air from the centre of the flying field.

When the deafening roar had died away, Mad Carew, staring wide-eyed across the field, saw that two of the monster troop-carriers had been blown to pieces by the tremendous explosion.

And then he saw that the third was racing away across the brilliantly illuminated field, taking-off. The dancing flames from the blazing planes revealed a white parachute lying tangled upon the ground, and then Mad Carew saw that the pilot of the escaping giant plane was none other than Baron von Schaffen.

He had deliberately destroyed two of the monster troop-carriers, and was making a bid to escape back to Germany in another.

For a split second Mad Carew stood and gasped, and then he galvanised into lightning action.

Leaping into the cockpit of the giant plane that had brought him back a prisoner from the enemies' back-areas, he, in one vicious movement, rammed home the master-throttle and yanked back the muffler control lever.

The heated engine caught at once. The huge plane trundled forward and a few seconds later it was climbing smoothly back into the air.

At five hundred feet Mad Carew's eyes came suddenly to rest upon a small lever with a single German word inscribed beneath it.

"A searchlight," he muttered. "Purple thunder, nothing could be better!"

He thumbed the switch sharply over. Instantly a broad beam of dazzling light gashed

through the darkness ahead of his climbing plane like a slash from a giant's knife.

And framed in the centre of that round, white beam he saw the other escaping giant plane.

With a vicious oath spitting through his clenched teeth Mad Carew jabbed both his thumbs savagely at the trigger release, and held them there.

Six Spandau machine-guns fitted at intervals along the leading edge of the monster plane's lower wings, opened out in a soul-shattering chorus.

Six vicious streams of fire pencilled blood-red lines down the beam of the searchlight and buried themselves into the bowels of the other gigantic plane.

A great sheet of flame spewed from out of the belly of the doomed monster, and then it went down, swirling in a huge vortex of raging flames—to crash into the ground like a falling meteor.

THE 333rd Flying Field was silent and quiet once more. The raid had, from the German point of view, been a complete fiasco, and all the cut-throat Germans in their black skin-tights were now being marched, as prisoners of war, away towards the nearest military prison, under an escort of armed Tommies.

And out on the centre of the flying field stood the gigantic plane that Mad Carew had captured, dwarfing the Bristol Fighters that stood lined up upon the tarmac in the gathering dawn light.

Mad Carew was in the Glory Hole, warmly praising his young war-hawks, who had all gathered there—with one exception.

That exception was Pilot Officer Bob Browning—a young pilot, who had been with the squadron less than a month.

"I commend for your admiration, gentlemen, the gallant behaviour of Pilot Officer Browning," Mad Carew said quietly. "As an eye-witness of his attack upon the giant troop-carrier, I can only say that his heroism and his death was a credit to the proud name of the 333rd."

"Poor old Browning!" Mike Cotton muttered solemnly. "I can thank my lucky stars that that wasn't me! I thought I was being true to character, and being unlucky when I couldn't find that bloomin' great plane again, after it had nearly bashed headlong into me—"

His words ended abruptly as a thunderous explosion echoed through the air, shaking the mess hut as if it were in the throes of a violent earthquake.

Rushing to the door the Bad Lads saw huge splintered remnants of the giant troop-carrier flying high into the air in all directions.

"So that was why Von Schaffen didn't bother about trying to destroy this plane as well as the other," Mad Carew cried grimly.

"He knew that there was an infernal machine on board it. So that's the last of the Von Schaffen's monsters, eh? Well, it's a good riddance to them. Perhaps when this war is over we shall see giant planes like this again, being used as peaceful liners."

A few minutes later, after Mad Carew had publicly congratulated Fred Fenton upon his heroism which had been the indirect cause of Von Schaffen's downfall, the dynamic little air ace strutted contentedly away from the mess hut.

"Blokes, three cheers for young Fenton," Mike Cotton roared. "Fenton, me young cock-sparrow, you did a fine piece of work last night."

A mischievous smile played around the corner of the new pilot's lips, and his face was no longer drawn and haggard.

"Last night, Mike?" he said innocently. "Let me see; was there a night last night?"

And the big roar of laughter was against snub-nosed Mike Cotton.

Another fine Six-Page story of Mad Carew and the Bad Lads in next Tuesday's issue of the TRIUMPH. Have you introduced them to your pals yet? There's one more day in February this year, and there's one more copy of TRIUMPH obtainable for that chum of yours—if he gives a definite order to a newsagent.

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SCHOOL HOUSE AND NEW HOUSE RIVALS JOIN FORCES AGAINST A BULLYING PREFECT

IT'S

ST. JIM'S

AGAIN!

THIS WEEK:
CATCHING OUT A CAD
By MARTIN CLIFFORD



THE CAPTURE

"HALLO, what's that thumping row?" Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther were at tea in their study in School House at St. Jim's when Tom made that remark. Talbot, the football star of the junior school, was with them.

Tom stepped to the window as a roar of voices came from the quadrangle below. Indignation came into his face immediately.

"The cheeky rotters!" he exclaimed. "What's the row?" asked Talbot. "New House cads! They've come into our quadrangle!"

The Shell fellows gathered at the window. Truly it was a sight to make any School House fellow indignant.

Across from New House had come long-legged Figgins, and he was backed up by his three New House pals, Kerr and Wynn, and Redfern, and half a dozen other New House chaps.

Furthermore, with unexampled cheek, they were punting a footer about under the very windows of School House.

Three School House chaps—Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth—had spotted them before Tom Merry had done so, and had promptly rushed upon them, with the intention, of course, of bagging the footer as a punishment for the cheek of the New House punters.

But Blake and Herries and Digby had been sent sprawling, and were left sorting themselves out in a rather muddy state, while Figgins & Co. continued their little game, actually banging the footer on the very wall of the School House.

"My hat! The nerve! Come on, you fellows!" shouted Tom Merry.

Leaving their tea unfinished, the four Shell fellows rushed out to take instant vengeance upon the invaders. They yelled to other chaps as they rushed along the passage.

"Rally round, School House! New House cads are here!"

Kangaroo of the Shell, Glyn and Reilly, Hammond and Lumley-Lumley, and half a dozen others were soon speeding after Tom Merry & Co.

They came downstairs with a swoop, and out into the quad with a yell.

"Buck up, School House!"

"On the ball!"

The School House juniors charged at Figgins & Co. There was a wild and whirling scrap at once, and the footer lay forgotten in the mud. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gathered himself up out of a puddle, and, heedless of the mud that clung to his beautiful bags, hurled himself into the fray.

"Cwush the boundahs, deah boys! Buck up!"

"Give 'em socks!"

More and more School House chaps joined the fray, and the odds mounted against Figgins & Co.

Back they were driven across the quadrangle, right to their own House, where they were forced into the porch.

"Victory!" howled Arthur Augustus. "And they've left their footer, deah boys!"

The School House chaps gave their defeated foes a final yell, then rushed back to their own side to capture the neglected footer.

"We'll punt it under their windows, and see if they come out!" shouted Blake.

"Good idea!"

A few seconds later, Figgins & Co., breathless and infuriated, looked out of their porch and saw the enemy punting the New House ball within a dozen yards of them.

It was not to be borne. "Go for 'em!" shouted Figgins. "We've got to get that ball back!"

The New House rushed to the attack. Sefton, the Sixth Form prefect, looked out of the door after they had scurried past him.

"Stop that row, you fags!" he shouted.

But Figgins & Co. did not heed Sefton. Their eyes were on the captured football. If School House succeeded in keeping that ball, it would be an indelible disgrace for the New House.

Tom Merry kicked the ball away towards his own House, and his whole crowd rushed after it. Figgins & Co. panted in pursuit.

"Give us our ball, you cads!"

"Come and get it!"

Jack Blake seized the ball as Figgins & Co. made a desperate charge, and whipped up the steps of the School House into the building.

A minute later he appeared at the window of Study No. 6, dangling the ball triumphantly over the heads of the juniors in the quad.

Tom Merry & Co. packed the steps of the School House and invited Figgins & Co. to charge.

Figgins gasped with rage. Even the daring Figgins could not think of invading the rival House and penetrating as far as the Fourth Form studies.

The number of his enemies did not matter, but in case of such an invasion, masters and prefects would have something to say.

"Victowry, deah boys! Huwway!"

"Who wants a footer?" roared Blake from the study window.

"Yah! School House cads!"

"Give us our ball!"

"Come and fetch it!"

At that moment, Mr. Carrington, Housemaster of School House, looked out of the window. At the sight of the Housemaster, Figgins & Co. melted away across the dusky quad. There was no arguing with authority.

In great spirits, Tom Merry & Co. crowded up to Study No. 6. Blake flourished the captured footer.

"We'll stick that up in our study as a trophy," said Tom Merry.

"In our study, you mean," said Blake warmly.

"Rot! We captured it!" said the captain of the Shell.

"Rats! Didn't I bring it in?"

"Yes; but if we hadn't come to the rescue they'd have walked all over you."

"Wubbish! That's our ball!"

"Look here, you cheeky Fourth Form fags—"

"I tell you—"

It looked as if the House row would be followed by a Form row. It never had been settled whether Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell or Study No. 6 of the Fourth were the leaders of the School House juniors.

It never was likely to be settled. But Talbot of the Shell chipped in and poured oil on the troubled waters.

"Gentlemen!"

"Yah! Get out!"

"Gentlemen, we have licked the New House and scored a worthy victory. I now suggest that whichever study keeps this ball, stands a feed all round to celebrate the victory."

"Hear, hear!" shouted all the fellows who did not belong to either rival study.

"Faith, it's a grand idea," said Reilly of the Fourth. "Passed unanimously."

"That's all very well," said Tom Merry, "but our study is out of funds. We've only got three sardines!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Gentlemen, I had a fivah from my gowenah this mornin', and—"

"Bravo Gussy's father!"

"And I am weady to stand a toppin' feed in honah of the victory."

"Done!" said Blake. "The footer stays here. I'll hang it up over the mantelpiece, and you Shell bounders can come and look at it whenever you like. Volunteers to fetch the tuck! Go with Gussy and help him carry it home, some of you. I'm going to keep an eye on this footer. I don't trust these Shell bounders."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, it isn't a bad idea, but it's got to be a first-class feed," he said.

"Wely on me, deah boy."

The captured football was hung up over the looking-glass, with a card stuck over it bearing an inscription in large letters:

"CAPTURED FROM THE ENEMY!
SCHOOL HOUSE IS COCK-HOUSE.
HURRAH!"

SEFTON CHIPS IN

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY did things in style. Arthur Augustus could always be relied upon to do that. The feed was topping, and the chaps came from all sides to join in it.

The banquet overflowed into the passage.

But that joyous celebration was not destined to pass off in unbroken harmony. The feast

was in full swing when voices sounded in excited tones from the passage.

"No room!"

"You can't come by!"

"What does a New House boulder want here, anyway?"

Tom Merry looked out of the study doorway, wondering if Figgins had come for his ball.

But it was not Figgins. A Sixth Former had come up the stairs, and it was Sefton of New House.

Sefton had had to stop. The passage was crowded—in fact, crammed. Nearly all the Fourth and the Shell who belonged to the School House had gathered there.

It was not every day that such a stunning feed was open to all comers.

Sefton was a prefect of the Sixth Form, but he was a bully, and unpopular even in his own House, and had no authority here.

So the chaps, strong in numbers, did not shift.

"Let me pass, you cheeky young cads!" rapped out Sefton.

"No room!"

"What do you want, anyway?"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" called out Tom Merry. "Want anything, Sefton?"

"You've stolen a football belonging to the New House. I've come for it," growled Sefton.

Tom Merry started.

In all little rags and rows between the rival chaps of St. Jim's it was an unwritten law that they depended on their own resources, and never called in the aid of masters or prefects.

To sneak was unpardonable. The law was kept with strict honour on both sides.

"Shame!" howled Gore. "Has Figgins been sneaking?"

"If Figgins wants his ball, why can't he come over for it himself, Sefton?" Tom Merry asked.

"A pretty reception you'd give him, I suppose," said Sefton.

"Well, we should chuck him out, of course," Tom admitted.

"Exactly. That's why I've come. You've

taken Figgins' ball, and I decline to see the juniors of my House put upon, so I've come for the ball. Don't say you've not got it. If you deny Figgins' statement—"

"Figgins' statement?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Do you deny it?"

"Nunno!"

"Then I want that ball, and if you kids don't get out of the way I shall tread on you!" added Sefton.

He shoved his way through the feasters in the passage, with disastrous results to the jam tarts and cups of coffee and hunka of cake which were scattered on all sides as the chaps were tumbled out of the prefect's way.

There was a buzz of indignation, and the fellows came very near to laying hands on Sefton, prefect though he was.

The bullying senior reached the doorway of Study No. 6 and noted the ball hung over the looking-glass, with its triumphant inscription, and scowled.

"That's Figgins' ball, I suppose. Hand it over at once."

The juniors in Study No. 6 looked at one another grimly. They were not in the least inclined to hand over the trophy of victory. That would be a little too much like a come-down.

Tom Merry turned the matter over rapidly in his mind. Sefton was a prefect on his own side, but he had no authority whatever in the School House.

"Are you going to give me that ball?" shouted Sefton impatiently.

"No!" answered Tom Merry.

"Then I'll take it!" declared Sefton.

He made a movement to push his way towards the mantelpiece. It was not easy, for the guests of Study No. 6 were wedged in.

And they wedged themselves close between Sefton and the mantelpiece. The prefect had to stop.

"Will you let me take that ball?"

"No," said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Once for all—"

"Rats!"

Sefton was red with rage. He made a jump at the captain of the Shell, and seized him by the collar.

"Pile in!" roared Blake.

A second later there would have been an unexampled scene in Study No. 6.

But just at that moment a trim figure in a frock-coat appeared in the doorway, and the voice of Monsieur Morny exclaimed:

"Stop! Stop viz you at vunce! Sefton, if you sall strike zat boy, you find yourself in ze trouble, isn't it?"

ORDERED OUT

SEFTON glared round at Monsieur Morny.

The juniors, who had been about to close on him, held off. It was just as well for them that Mossoo had chipped in at that critical moment. For, though undoubtedly Sefton was exceeding his authority, it was no light matter for junior chaps to handle a prefect.

Monsieur Morny raised his hand in a commanding gesture.

"Sefton, zis is verree wrong! You sall not do zat."

Sefton almost choked with rage. To be

called to account like this before juniors was too humiliating.

"Sir!" spluttered Sefton.

"I hear a great noise here," said Monsieur Morny. "I come viz myself along to say zat it bettair to make less of ze noise viz you. And I find, Sefton, zat you bully. Zat is wrong."

Sefton controlled himself with an effort.

"I've come over here to take away a football which these young rascals have collared from a junior in my House."

The juniors looked on with bated breath. They wondered how Mossoo would play up.

They were not long left in doubt.

"I interfere not with prefects as a rule," said Mossoo mildly. "But in zis House you are not a prefect. You are prefect in ze ozzer House. If you shall have complaint to make, you shall to your Housemaster go, and you take not ze law in your own hands, isn't it? You have no right here."

"But I tell you—" began Sefton, who knew very well that Mossoo's statement was quite correct. He had no right here.

Another commanding gesture from Mossoo. "You tell me nozzing, Sefton. It is I zat tell you. Zere are prefects in zis House to deal viz ze garcons here. You have no right. I suggest to you zat you retire yourself from zis study."

Sefton ground his teeth, but even a prefect dared not disobey a master.

The Sixth Form bully cast a furious look behind him. He mentally promised Tom Merry & Co. all sorts of things.

The chaps in the passage cheerfully made room, and the bully of the New House walked away, followed by Mossoo.

Mossoo was very quiet and very calm, but very determined. He followed the bully along the passage to the landing, and watched him go down the staircase.

Then Monsieur Morny walked away.

Kildare was standing in the lower hall, talking to two other School House prefects—Darrell and Rushden. The seniors stared at the sight of Sefton.

"Good-day, Sefton!" said Kildare amiably.

"What brought you over to this House?"

"Your young cads have stolen a football belonging to our side!" hissed Sefton. "I came to take it back!"

"And they wouldn't give it to you?" chuckled Rushden. "You ought to know better than to tackle a gang of juniors on their native heath! Why couldn't you ask Kildare?"

"Well, I ask him now!" snarled Sefton. "Tom Merry and his friends have stolen Figgins' football!"

"Stolen? Don't be an ass!" said Kildare unceremoniously. "I suppose they've bagged it for a lark. Still, it shall certainly be returned. I'll get it!"

Kildare ascended the stairs. He arrived at Study No. 6 just as the School House chaps were getting down to their feast again, and voting Mossoo a real brick. They quietened down a little as Kildare looked in.

"Make room for Kildare," said Blake hospitably. "Come in, Kildare, old chap! You'll like this cake!"

Kildare laughed.

"I've come for a football belonging to the New House," he said. "I see it there. You can keep the victorious inscription, but hand over the footer!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I say, Kildare!"

"That's our footer," explained Tom Merry. "It was a New House footer once, but it's ours now by—by right of conquest!"

"I'm waiting," said Kildare.

Amid a general gloom the football was handed over to Kildare, who departed with it. Sefton left the School House with the footer under his arm, satisfied that he had "done" the juniors to that extent, at least.

In Study No. 6 there was gloom and indignation.

"Our own familiar captain backing up against us!" said Blake bitterly.

"Our own familiar friend!" murmured Monty Lowther.

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"A wegular twaitor to the House, bai Joye!"

"Perhaps Sefton asked him for it," suggested Talbot. "Kildare couldn't do anything else in that case."

"That's so," said Manners. "But Sefton's a cad!"

The juniors gave a deep groan for Sefton and then proceeded—in much less joyously—the feed.

UNDER A CLOUD

IT was just after morning lessons next day that Figgins & Co. heard of "the Sefton incident" in School House.

They had wondered, when, the previous evening, Sefton had looked into their study, chuckled their football in to them, and then walked away without a word.

The unexpected return of the footer had set them making inquiries, and gradually they had gleaned particulars of Sefton's visit to School House and his attempt to demand the ball back from Tom Merry & Co.

"What did Sefton want to interfere for?" Figgins asked angrily. "We can fight our own battles! We don't want blinkin' prefects bursemaiding us!"

"Making trouble on purpose, I guess!" growled Kerr.

"Like as not, Tom Merry & Co. will think we sneaked to Sefton!" said Figgins.

"Not they!" protested Redfern. "We may call each other names and pretend that nothing good could possibly come out of each others' Houses, but—well, they know we're not sneaks!"

Figgins was not impressed.

"At any rate," put in Kerr, "I think we ought to set ourselves right with the School House chaps!"

Redfern nodded.

"They might think us sneaks if Sefton came in for the ball and told Tom Merry & Co. you had asked him to come for it!" said Kerr.

"It's just like that cad, to make trouble! Come up to the study and let's think out a note!"

And thus it was that, immediately after dinner, a messenger was dispatched to the School House.

"BAI JOVE! Don't I wecognise that footah?"

Tom Merry & Co. were standing on the steps of the School House after dinner when Jameson of the Third, a New House fag, was spotted coming across the quad. Jameson had a football in one hand and a note in the other.

The School House chaps watched him in some surprise. Footballs are much alike, but they thought they recognised the ball which had been the cause of so much dispute.

Jameson handed the ball and the note to Tom Merry, and bunched away without a word. The chums of the School House looked at each other in astonishment.

"It's the ball!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's in the note?"

Tom Merry opened the missive and unfolded it. The School House fellows crowded together to read it. It was written in Figgy's sprawling hand, with one or two of his little originalities of spelling.

"Here's the footer," it read. "Keep it as long as you can. I promiss you it won't be for very long. We don't know, of course, what you rotters may be thinking, but we didn't ask Sefton to act as our messenger and fetch it. At any rate, we're sending the ball back herewith, as it may have found its way back to us through a misaprehension."

(This word had apparently presented considerable difficulties, for it was crossed out twice before the writer had achieved that final, happy result.)

"You just see how long you can kepe that ball, you School House kids. And we the undersned are ready to lick any School House

cad who has enough pluck to come round behind the gym after lessons.

"(Sined) George Figgins, George Kerr, David Wynn."

"P.S.—Rats!"

The School House chaps read through that touching missive, which, to judge by the number of blots and smears on it, had been a task of some difficulty to Figgins of the Fourth.

The fierce indignation of George Figgins seemed to breathe through the scrawl, the blots, and the smears.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another when they had finished.

"There's only one thing to be done now, deah boys!"

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Give 'em the footah back, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Gussy's right," remarked Talbot. "There'll be no honour in keeping it now!"

Tom Merry nodded assent.

So the whole party trooped over to New House, and not seeing any sign of Figgins & Co. downstairs they ascended to Figgy's study. Figgy & Co. were there.

"What do you worms want crawling over here?" was Fatty Wynn's greeting to them.

"Thanks for the ball!" said Tom Merry. "But under the cires we think it would be best if you kept it."

"Oh, bad attack of funk—what?" snorted Figgins.

"Why, you ass—"

"Pway leave it to me, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus with lofty dignity. "We can lick these persons aftahwards!"

"Lick your great-grandmother!" sneered Figgins. "You couldn't lick our smallest fag, you glass-eyed monkey!"

"Bai Joye!"

"Order!" said Talbot, trying to keep the peace. "Do listen and be reasonable, Figgins. And instead of going for one another, suppose we put our heads together and make Sefton sit up? He'd no business to interfere, we agree!"

Matters had begun to look very threatening, but there was a general rolling-by of the clouds at that suggestion. All the faces cleared. Talbot had succeeded in pouring oil on troubled waters.

He placed the footer on the study table.

"Well, that's right," said Blake. "Sefton had no right to chip in."

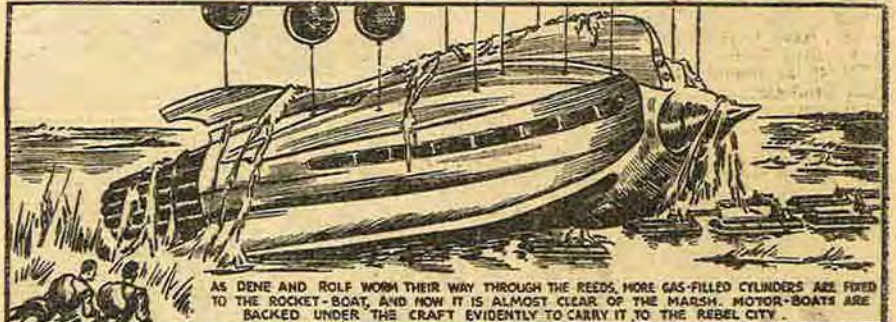
DERICKSON DENE

SYNOPSIS.

Derickson Dene, inventor, is marooned on an unknown planet. Rolf, his mechanic, is captured by the people of a rebel city.

Dene rescues Rolf, and they escape to a log cabin in which lives an old hermit named Halj. He gives Dene a map that will enable him and Rolf to cross the Marshland and reach some beggars and down-and-outs they are trying to help.

Dene and Rolf set out on their journey. They have been travelling several hours when, from a tree-top, they see squads of men salvaging the rocket-flying-boat in which Dene had come to the planet, and which the rebels had brought down with a gravity-plus ray plant.



(Continued on next page)

"Yes, I'm willing to admit that," said Figgins.

"Yaa, and we give up the football!"

"You can keep it," said Figgins.

"No. We've brought it back."

"I'd rather you kept it," insisted Figgins.

It was a contest of generosity now. The clouds had quite rolled by.

"No," said Tom Merry firmly. "But come on, cut out further argument, and let's have a council of war, and decide how to deal with Sefton. And I propose that all House rows are barred until the cad aforesaid is made to feel properly sorry for himself."

"Hear, hear!"

And the rivals of St. Jim's, all animosity now banished, put their heads together to make plans for the discomfiture of the bully of the Sixth.

But they were still laying plans when the bell rang for afternoon school, and as lessons could not be postponed, even for the most important enterprises, Sefton of the Sixth had to be granted a respite.

FIREWORKS

"I'm going," said Figgins.

"I'll get tea while you're gone," said

Fatty Wynn. "Mind Sefton doesn't spot you, that's all."

"That's all right," said Figgins. "Sefton's out. Of course," he added thoughtfully, "we

arranged with those School House chaps to let them have a hand in ragging the cad."

"This jape won't wait whilst they're fetched," said Kerr, with a shake of his head.

"Besides, it's a one-man job. It's not even wise for us to come and watch you. We'll tell them about it afterwards. They're coming over to tea, and if we tell them then, they'll agree we were wise to act whilst we had the chance."

"Right!" said Figgins. "Leave it to me!" "Be careful," said Kerr. "Sefton may come in."

"You trust your uncle," replied Figgins re-assuringly.

He left the study—on the warpath. He sauntered, with a very careless air, into the Sixth Form passage.

Fortunately, there were no prefects hanging about, and Figgins slipped quietly into Sefton's study.

Figgins' object was simple. He had a pocketful of jumping crackers, which were to be arranged in Sefton's grate, where the fire had been neatly laid by his fag.

When Sefton put a match to the fire, he would meet with the surprise of his life. Figgins chuckled to himself as he proceeded to arrange the crackers in among the sticks and paper, so carefully piled up by Sefton's fag.

In order to make his arrangements without

leaving anything suspicious in sight, Figgy had to be very careful.

But he was done at last, and he rose to his feet with the feeling of satisfaction that comes of a good work well done.

"About time I cleared," he murmured. "Oh, my hat!"

Footsteps sounded in the passage outside. Probably it wasn't Sefton coming home, but Figgy didn't want to take risks. He knew what would happen if the bully of the Sixth caught him in his study—especially when the fire came to be lighted.

Figgins promptly slithered out of sight behind the bed. There were curtains round the bed in the alcove, and Figgins was well hidden. He waited for the footsteps to pass.

But the footsteps did not pass. They stopped at the door of the study, and the door opened. It was Sefton, after all.

Figgins thanked his lucky stars that he had had the forethought to get out of sight. As it was only tea-time, Sefton couldn't be going to bed, so he was not likely to discover the junior in his hiding-place.

Then Figgins made the disconcerting discovery that Sefton was not alone. He had a School House junior with him.

"You can come in, Levison," he heard the prefect say. "What do you want?"

"Just a word or two, Sefton," came Levison's voice.

"Well, buck up!"

Levison, the cad of the Fourth, came into the study, and closed the door carefully behind him. Sefton watched the proceeding with surprise.

"What the deuce is the matter?" he demanded gruffly.

"I've got something to tell you," Levison answered. "It's about Mossoo."

"Hang Mossoo!" growled Sefton.

"I'd hang him with pleasure," said Levison. "Look here, Sefton, you don't like Mossoo. He ordered you out of the School House, and made you look a fool before all the fellows."

"Well, what's that got to do with you?" growled Sefton.

"I've come to tell you how you can get even with Mossoo," said Levison.

"Don't jaw to me about any of your fag japes," replied Sefton contemptuously.

"Tain't a fag jape. It might get Mossoo the sack."

"What?" Sefton was interested now. "I know you're a deep young scoundrel, Levison, but what you just said is rot."

"I'll tell you," said Levison. "Did you know Mossoo's been visiting pawnshops?"

"No, I didn't; and I don't believe it."

"It's true," said Levison. "I saw him myself, sneaking out of Moses' place in Wayland. But I can prove it," he added, as Sefton shrugged his shoulders, implying very plainly that something more than Levison's word was wanted. "I've got the ticket."

"You've got what?" ejaculated Sefton.

"Look at that!"

Sefton took a pawnticket Levison held out.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

"Looks like business—what?" grinned Levison.

"You've pinched this?"

"I—I picked it up in the quad," said Levison. "Mossoo is frightfully careless with his things, you know. Must have dropped it."

"More likely you pinched it out of his study," said Sefton.

"Well, it doesn't matter how I got hold of it. There it is. What would the Head think if he saw that?"

Sefton whistled. "My hat! It's enough to make a regular scandal! I don't suppose it would mean the sack for him, but I shouldn't like to be in his shoes when the Head asks him about it."

"Well," said Levison, "suppose you take it to the Head? You needn't mention me, or Mossoo may think I took it out of his study."

"As you did."

"Well, supposo I did? Mossoo doesn't know. It might have been anybody, and whoever took it might have chucked it out into the quad. You picked it up in the quad, and you take it to the Head."

Sefton's eyes gleamed. He had been simply



(Continued opposite)

yearning for a chance to get his own back on the French master, for the humiliation he had suffered in Study No. 6, and now it seemed the chance had come.

"But the Head would ask me why I hadn't taken it to Mosssoo, as his name's on it," he said slowly. "I can't let the Head think I want to down Mosssoo."

"That's easy enough. You can say you don't believe it's a real pawnticket, and that you think some fag had made it up for a joke on Mosssoo. Of course, you're not supposed to know anything about pawntickets. Finding that in the quad, you feel it your duty as a prefect to bring it to the notice of the Head, as a disgraceful joke against a master whom you respect highly."

Sefton gazed at the cad of the Fourth in silence for a moment. Then he exclaimed:

"All right, I'm on. The Head will be waxy—there's no doubt about that. He'll know it's a genuine pawnticket. Still, there's no reason why I should know. The Head won't even know that I've ever seen one before."

"Don't mention my name, of course," said Levison anxiously. "That would spoil it all. It would give it away that you're up against Mosssoo."

"That's all right. I picked it up in the quad," said Sefton.

Figgins, peering out through the curtains, saw the prefect slide the ticket into his waistcoat pocket.

"You're going to the Head, then?" said Levison.

"Yes. I'll cut across after tea. You'd better clear off. No need for you to be seen here. And mind you keep your mouth shut."

"You bet!"

"You can light my fire before you go," said Sefton, "and call my fag for me as you go—your young Dibbs."

"All right."

Levison struck a match, and knelt before the fire.

Figgins waited breathlessly in his hiding-place. The crash was coming now, and Levison was going to get the chief benefit of it instead of Sefton. But after what he had just heard, Figgins was not sorry for that.

The paper in the grate flared up, and a moment or two later the fun began.

Bang, bang!

"My hat!"

Bang!

"Great Scott!"

Bang, bang, bang!

BACKING UP MOSSOO

LEVISON staggered away from the grate. His face was black with coal-dust. Sefton yelled as a jumping cracker fell at his feet.

It was one of those fearsome crackers that explode a dozen times in succession. It exploded between Sefton's shoes, and Sefton jumped.

Then it banged behind him, and he jumped again, and jumped right on it. Then bang, bang, bang! under his very feet.

"What the thunder—"

"Oh, oh! Yow!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

"What on earth's the row?" shouted Monteith of the Sixth, throwing open the door and looked in in amazement. "My hat! Oh!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Yarrah!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Monteith. "What a niff of gunpowder! Really, Sefton, this is a bit too thick!"

"You silly idiot!"

"Eh—what?"

"Some young cad has filled my firegrate with crackers!" yelled Sefton. "Do you think I should make my study in this state, you fathead? Look at it!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Well, it does look rather in a muck," grinned Monteith. "I think I'll be off. I don't like the smell of this study, Sefton."

The room was filled with smoke and the reek of gunpowder. Scattered sticks and coal lay over the carpet. Sefton threw open the window. Levison dodged out, and his coal-

appearance as he hurried down the passage elicited yells of laughter from the fellows who had been attracted to the spot by the explosions.

The reek in the study was a little too much for Sefton. He stamped out furiously into the passage, breathing wrath and destruction.

That was Figgins' opportunity.

He whipped out from behind the bed, scudded across the study, and swung himself out of the window. In a moment more he had dropped into the quad, and was walking round to the door with a perfectly calm expression.

Kerr and Wynn had joined the crowd in the Sixth Form passage, and Figgins joined them there. The three chums exchanged joyous grins.

"Who did this?" Sefton was yelling.

"Dibbs—where's Dibbs? Dibbs, you young scoundrel, you put crackers in my grate when you laid my fire!"

"That I jolly well didn't!" exclaimed Dibbs, in alarm. "The fire was all right when I laid it, Sefton."

"Then who did it?" roared Sefton.

"Blessed if I know—Yow! Leggo my ear!"

"Let him go, Sefton!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "Dibbs says that he hadn't anything to do with it."

"Draw it mild, Sefton," said the head prefect. "Better find the right party before you hand out the licking, you know."

Sefton let Dibbs go.

Figgins & Co returned to their study. They found quite a crowd of guests awaiting them. Tom Merry & Co. had arrived as invited.

"Kept you waiting?" said Kerr. "Sorry."

"Pway don't mench, deal boy."

"We've been delayed," explained Figgins. "Somebody seems to have put crackers in Sefton's grate, and there has been lots of trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll have tea now," said Fatty Wynn.

"Hold on!" said Figgins.

Fatty stared at his leader.

"Hold on?" he echoed. "What do you mean? We're late for tea as it is."

"No time for tea," said Figgins automatically. "We've got to hold a council of war now."

"After tea, Figgy," urged Fatty Wynn.

"No, now," said Figgins firmly.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry.

"Jolly wrong," said Figgins. "Shut the door, Kerr. Look here, you fellows, this is awfully serious."

Fatty Wynn suppressed a groan. It was certainly awfully serious, from his point of view, if tea was to be postponed.

"That cad Levison has been over here," said Figgins.

"We passed him in the quad," said Tom.

(Continued on next page.)

