

**THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY,  
6<sup>TH</sup> SERIES, ISSUE 1**

**THE SILENT THUNDER CAPER  
BY MARK HODDER**

**&**

**THE WIRELESS TELEPHONE CLUE  
BY G. H. TEED**

Obverse Books  
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**CONSULTING ROOM CHAT**

re newly launched *Union Jack* story paper in mid -1894.

lessed with a new set of writers, and with Blake's world expanded to take in his Baker Street base, his customised 'plane and car, and his new assistant Tinker, the character became the star of the paper, remaining so even after *Union Jack* became *Detective Weekly* in 1933.

Concurrently with these story paper appearances, however, Blake starred in his own range of publications – the famous Sexton Blake Library. Commencing in 1915 with GH Teed's 'The Yellow Tiger' and ending with Wilfred McNeilly's 'Down Amongst the Old Men' in 1968, new Blake fiction was released every year except 1964, introducing a plethora of villains and friends along the way, as the series amassed five distinct series of adventures, spread over several hundred different stories.

And now, we are delighted to launch the sixth series of the Sexton Blake Library, with Mark Hodder's 'THE SILENT THUNDER CAPER', backed by an original GH Teed story 'THE WIRELESS TELEPHONE CLUE' which first saw the light of day in 1922.

In future quarterly editions, we will have new Blake novels from George Mann, Michael Moorcock and many others but for now sit back and enjoy the first new Blake prose fiction for nearly fifty years!

- The Editor

# **THE SILENT THUNDER CAPER**

**BY MARK HODDER**

*A complete story of the world-famous detective Sexton Blake and his young assistant inker, in which that nefarious trio The Three Musketeers are re-introduced and a brand new character known as "The Gentleman" makes his debut.*

## **PROLOGUE**

SILVER disc emerged from the blanket of cloud and descended. Smoothly an

Bancroft watched for a further five minutes until the dust had dispersed enough to show that no trace of the buildings remained.

He lowered his binoculars and looked down at the grotesque figure standing at his side. It possessed a tiny child-like body with oddly attenuated limbs and a thin neck upon which a big head wobbled precariously. The cranium was hairless and appeared swollen, as if it encased an unnaturally large brain. Big jet black eyes gazed back at him. The nose was a mere lump, the mouth a lipless slit above a sharply pointed chin.

The general shuddered.

“Great heavens!” he whispered hoarsely. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Nothing can stand against it.”

“Exactly,” the other said in a fluting, high-pitched voice. “Perhaps now you will believe me, General, when I say that the governments of this planet must immediately disband their armies and lay aside their weapons.”

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### **Mrs. Bardell Complains—Visitors Arrive—An Artefact is Revealed**

THERE’S a Sir Bustin’ Chamber Pot at the front door, Mr. Blake. Says ‘e’s a forriner secret an’ sinister in the nude cabaret and ‘ow ‘e’s come to insult you.”

Sexton Blake, the famous consulting detective of Baker Street, smiled at his housekeeper. “I believe you mean Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Bardell. He’s a minister in the new Cabinet and has come to consult with me. Please show him up, would you?”

His young assistant, Tinker, seated at a table where he was updating the Baker Street index, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and attempted to smother an apparent f

“Sir Austen is a high-ranking politician.”

“Ho! Is he now? Ho! Well then, in that case I’ll show ‘im up an’ on the way treat ‘ir to a few choice words about the price o’ ‘taters.”

“I’m sure he’ll be pleased to receive your insights. Incidentally, I’m expecting two further guests.”

“An’ I suppose they’ll want their ‘ands ‘eld as they dirty the stair carpet, too?”

“If you’d be so kind. I’m sorry Mrs. Bardell. I’m hosting a very important meeting this morning. I’ll make it up to you, I promise.”

“Meeting? On a Sunday morning? It ain’t proper. Is the defective suspect coming?”

“Detective Inspector Coutts? No, he won’t be attending.”

“Good. I don’t like the way ‘e stomps those clod-‘oppin’ great feet of ‘is around the place. ‘E’s like the probable ball in the Chinese shop.”

“Oh my giddy aunt!” Tinker gasped. “She means the proverbial bull in—in—ha ha ha!—ho ho ho!”

“An’ you can stop that!” Mrs. Bardell snapped. “You young hooliglum!”

“The minister—?” Blake reminded her.

“An’ speakin’ of the Horient,” his housekeeper continued relentlessly, “me macaroni fireless is on the blink and them enunciators sound like they’re bein’ transmogrified from Shangri-la.”

A stifled “Uff—uff—uff!” came from behind the handkerchief into which Tinker had again buried his face.

“Then a new Marconi wireless shall be yours. Now, I think Sir Austen has waited long enough.”

Mrs. Bardell left the consulting room with a final glance and “tut-tut!” thrown in Tinker’s direction.

Blake turned to the mirror above the fireplace and straightened his tie. He was a ta

Knuckles rapped at the door.

"Come!" Blake called.

Mrs. Bardell ushered in a tall distinguished looking individual.

"Sir Bustin' Chamber Pot!" she announced haughtily before making her exit.

The politician hesitated, looking bemused.

Blake strode forward, his hand outstretched. "Sir Austen, please come in and make yourself comfortable."

They shook hands and the Foreign Secretary, following Blake's gesture, crossed to the hearthrug, presented his wet trouser legs to the fire, and pulled a cigar from his pocket.

"Beastly weather, Blake. Absolutely beastly. Raining buckets. Mind if I smoke? Who'd have thought it was mid-July? How are you? I hear you had the devil of a time out there in Ethiopia. Or is it Abyssinia? The johnnies can never make up their minds. What was it? Sunny, I mean?"

"I'm fine, thank you, Sir Austen. Yes, it was sunny and a mite too hot for comfort, by all means. Coffee? Brandy?"

"Good lord, it's far too early in the day for brandy. Just a sip, perhaps. Medicinal. It'll get my blood flowing again. The rain has chilled me to the marrow. Difficult to come by in Ethiopia, I imagine. Brandy, I mean. No call for it, what with the sun and the heat. Too hot, you say? Too hot. What!"

Blake addressed Tinker. "Pour the drinks, would you? Coffee for me."

The minister exclaimed, "Ah! Tinker my boy! How the dickens are you? By the Lord Larry, the two of you look burnt to a crisp. Too much sunshine in Africa. Not enough here. It's the climate, apparently. I say, steady, lad! The merest drizzle of soda, if you please. Just show the brandy the syphon. That's it! Just the ticket!"

Sir Austen eased himself into an armchair, stretched his now steaming legs out, and

urprise, it formed a perfect ring. “Ah, yes, the Empress. Did she really try to send you to your deaths?”

“She informed us that an outbreak of tribal warfare had made our planned route back to the coast too dangerous. As it turned out, what she suggested as an alternative took us into a taboo region jealously guarded by ferocious warriors.”

“If you’ll pardon my Americanism, what’s the old girl’s beef?”

“Simply that she fears change and hates the Negus, who embodies it. There’s little he can do to thwart him though, except perhaps to meddle, thus her sending us into an area of the country where we’d be attacked and killed. She hoped to delay the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations.”

“So we have a fly in our ointment.”

The detective took a sip of coffee and shook his head. “Not for long. I think she’ll be dead before the year is done.”

“Ah! Assassination. It’s rife in hot countries.”

“Not assassination. Typhoid.”

“Oh. Excellent! Um, I mean, unfortunate. Poor soul! Poor soul! I say, this brandy very good indeed.” Sir Austen took a generous gulp, gave a satisfied sigh, and then cried out, “Tinker my boy, would you mind splashing a little more flavour into this lack of soda?”

Tinker gave a chuckle and fetched the decanter.

Having received his refill, the minister sat quietly and gazed down at his shoes. After a minute, he said, “What of the—er—item?”

“As I said,” Blake responded, “the Empress purposely directed us into a forbidden region. It was inhabited by a secretive cult. While Tinker and I were fleeing from its warrior priests, we fell through a thin crust of earth into a maze of underground chambers, obviously ecclesiastical in design. That’s where we discovered it.”

The three new arrivals stepped in.

Blake said, "Good morning to you, gentlemen."

Handshakes were exchanged.

One of the men, in military uniform, said, "I'm General Bancroft. Pleased to meet you, Blake. You have quite the reputation." Though of medium height, he was broad-shouldered and tough-looking, with very short grey hair and a bristling moustache. His eyes were bright blue, his voice somewhat raspy.

"Hello, General." Blake indicated Sir Austen. "You're already acquainted with the Foreign Secretary, of course, and this young man is my assistant, known to all as Tinker."

Bancroft nodded to both, looking askance at the youngster.

"It's all right," Blake said, "He's been working with me for years and is thoroughly trustworthy and reliable." He glanced at the unexpected addition to the party, and addressed his assistant. "Drag over another chair, Tinker."

Bancroft sat beside Sir Austen while Blake greeted the others. "Hallo again, Sir Frederic."

Sir Frederic Kenyon smiled and nodded. The Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum was every inch the academic, of medium height, bald, with a fringe of wavy grey hair, a thin moustache and bushy sideburns. "I hope you don't mind that I've brought my right-hand man along. Professor Gideon Keen is—"

"—a classical scholar of great repute," Blake finished. "We've met before."

"My goodness! Have we?" Professor Keen queried. "I don't quite remember. Got a mind like a sieve for names and faces."

"There was the ball at Lady Marjory Dorn's last autumn, then the shooting party at Sir Corby Roachford's summer house in Devonshire the following November, and more recently the gathering organised by the Countess of Warlowe in Malmsbury."

ntirely buried in the past.”

There came a slight pause during which Blake made a quick assessment of Keer noting his fastidious neatness, the precision of his movements, and the deep ingrained crease rising up from between his eyes. The professor was a tall, thin anky man whose clean-shaven face appeared pinched, as if the cheeks and lips were permanently sucked in against the teeth. His nose was a bony blade, hooked and regular; his cheekbones and jaw angular and sharp; his hair dark and neatly cut. He was wearing a blue-black hand-tailored Italian suit, a pale yellow cravat, and pristine black leather shoes.

He was, Blake thought, something of a *poseur*.

“Gentlemen,” the detective said, “shall we take a look at the item we’re here to discuss?”

They all nodded.

Blake crossed the room to a bookshelf, swung it outward on cleverly concealed hinges, and revealed a wall safe. After clicking its dial back and forth, he opened it, reached in, and took something out. He closed the safe, returned to his guests, and raised a hand, holding a small object between his forefinger and thumb. The firelight reflected off its many facets.

“By God!” Sir Austen whispered. “Is it really the genuine article?”

“It is,” Blake confirmed. “This is the fabled Ring of Solomon.”