

# **fantastic**

## **ADVENTURES**

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "Genie of Bagdad." Back cover painting by Malcolm Smith, depicting "Warriors of Other Worlds." Illustrations by Robert Fuqua; Magarian; Rod Ruth; Robert Gibson Jones; Julian S. Krupa

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ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

William B. Ziff, Publisher; Howard Browne, Assistant Editor; B. G. Davis, Editor; Raymond A. Palmer, Managing Editor; Herman R. Bollin, Art Director; H. G. Strong, Circulation Director.

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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Washington Office, Earle B. King, Washington, D. C. Special Washington representative, Col. Harold E. Hartney, Occidental Hotel. London editorial representative, A. Spencer Allberry, Chandos Cottage, Court Road, Ickenham, Uxbridge, Middx., England. Entered as second-class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription \$2.50 a year (12 issues); Canada, \$3.00; Foreign, \$3.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.



# Sky Imp

By **CHESTER S. GEIER**

**They called Bob Lennox a coward when Von Thelm, ace of the Nazi Luftwaffe, ran him out of the skies. Then Bob found the way to make a friend out of his *real* foe!**

**B**OB LENNOX paused at the turn in the road leading to the little group of stone farm buildings in the distance. He looked back over the way he had come, and it was as though he looked back upon some unpleasant memory of the past. He knew, now, just what he had to do. That lonely walk had done him good.

He dropped the butt of his cigarette into the dust of the road and ground it into lifelessness with a purposeful heel. Then, squaring his shoulders, he went on.

Lights gleamed from the windows of the farm buildings when Bob Lennox reached them. Evening was deepening swiftly into night, and heavy shadows lay draped over the outwardly peaceful English countryside. Only those who knew would look for the signs of clever camouflaging which hid the fact that the farm buildings and its fields were in reality a British airdrome.

It was several months before the catastrophe of Pearl Harbor. The Nazi Luftwaffe still swept in vicious waves over English cities and towns. American air fighters were making history in the R. A. F. Bob Lennox was one of the many who had volunteered. But in a sense he was almost isolated here, for he was the only American with the tiny 15th R. A. F. pursuit squadron hidden "somewhere" in the north of England. It was this more than anything else which made things so difficult for him.

Lennox took the flagstone path which led to the Commander's office in the main building. He strode stiffly now, eyes fixed straight before him, his broad shoulders set defensively.

Benches were placed along the ivy-covered walls of the main building, and on these sat the pilots of the 15th, their pipes and cigarettes glowing in the shadows. Their drawling British voices were raised in the laughing banter typi-

cal of the fighter at ease. But as Lennox passed by a frigid silence fell over them. They sat very still, watching him with hostile, condemnatory eyes. The American's lips twisted bitterly.

Lennox had his hand on the door that led into the main building when suddenly one of them spoke.

"Blimey, did yer see it?" asked a mocking nasal voice. "'is yeller streak even shines at night!"

"And that's only the light from 'is backbone," added another. "Take off 'is British uniform and 'e'd look like 'e'd been dipped in yellow luminol."

**L**ENNOX winced as though struck a physical blow. He entered quickly, shutting the door against the taunting laughter which followed. His eyes blazing, he walked down a short hall and entered what had once been the farmhouse living room.

Little of its former quaint, sturdy furnishings were in evidence. The pictures had been taken down from the walls and in their places hung maps, charts, and bulletin boards. The rug had been rolled up and placed in a corner, and the bare boards of the floor were tracked and scuffed. A log burned cracklingly in the stone fireplace. At a desk, once a kitchen table, but covered now with telephones and papers, sat Major James Carewe, squadron commander of the 15th R. A. F. air base.

Carewe looked up as Lennox approached the desk. He was a personification of everything British, from his trimly-tailored uniform to his military mustache and the stubby briar pipe gripped between his teeth.

"Eh? Oh—Lennox." Carewe's manner became abruptly perfunctory and slightly patronizing. He took his pipe from his mouth and leaned back in the chair. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to make a special request,

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sir," Lennox began. "You see, the attitude of the men toward me hasn't changed ever since that—that Channel incident. And—well, I just can't stand it any more. I want your permission to go over the Channel and fight von Thelm."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Lennox. There's a rule, you'll remember, forbidding solo flights near enemy territory. Makes it too easy to fall into a Jerry trap."

"I know that, sir, but this is a different case. You know that once a week, on a Wednesday, von Thelm flies a little way over the Channel as a challenge to Allied pilots. He's too self-confident and conceited to make a trap of it, however."

"That makes little difference," Carewe said, smiling wryly. "One of the reasons for the rule was to prevent foolhardy pilots from engaging von Thelms and getting shot down. In some ways it was an official admission of the fact that von Thelm is a better fighter than anyone we have."

"But you've just got to give me this chance, sir!" Lennox pleaded. "I won't be able to stay with the squadron if you don't—or in England, either, for that matter. No one will have anything to do with a man branded a coward."

Carewe frowned impatiently. "Oh, come now, Lennox. What you're asking is a bit too much, you know. You may be a volunteer American and entitled to special privileges and all that sort of thing, but we have certain rules and regulations which we can't allow even you chappies to ignore. Besides, General Headquarters would break me if I permitted you to do what you're asking."

**L**ENNOX dropped his gaze to his hands, his square, brown face twisted despairingly. Suddenly he

looked up again, his eyes agleam.

"See here, sir," he said eagerly. "If official permission of my request is impossible, what about unofficial permission?"

"Eh? I'm rather afraid that I don't understand you, Lennox."

"I mean this, sir. Let me have a ship to go over the Channel and fight von Thelm. It can then be made to look as though I had taken it without your permission"

Carewe shook his head slowly. "I can't do that. Von Thelm hasn't yet been beaten in a dogfight. You'd be shot down just as surely as you're standing here now. We might be able to spare the loss of a man, but hardly that of a ship, I'm afraid."

Lennox leaned across the desk, his youthful features aged by a savage earnestness. "Major Carewe, put yourself in my place. I've become an outcast, a pariah. None of the others will have anything to do with me. They think I'm a coward—that I deliberately ran from von Thelm and his crew of vultures that day over the Channel. I've got to prove that I'm not."

"Look, sir. You're a fighting man and you know that, second only to his country, a fighting man places his honor and integrity above all else. I know, if such a circumstance should ever occur, that you'd never hesitate to avenge a slight upon your courage. Then suppose you were called a coward because of an incident over which you had no means of control. Wouldn't you make every effort to reinstate yourself in the eyes of others? Would anything in life ever be the same again if you were denied the opportunity? Surely, the loss of a ship isn't too great a price to pay for redemption."

Carewe was chewing the tip of his mustache, his eyes thoughtful. He rose from the chair and began pacing the

floor. Abruptly, he faced the American.

"I shouldn't do this, Lennox," he said. "But you've made it a personal question of one fighting man to another. In that way I can't obstruct your desire for vindication without reflection upon my own honor as a fighting man. I'll give you your chance—but remember the responsibility for the outcome will be yours and yours alone."

"That's all I ask, sir."

"All right, then. Here's what I'll do. Tomorrow is Wednesday and von Thelm will, no doubt, be at the usual place. In the morning I'll order a plane checked and warmed up for a special flight. While I'm ostensibly giving its pilot instructions, you can climb in and take over. Good luck." Carewe extended his hand and Lennox gripped it briefly.

**I**N BED later that night, Lennox found his thoughts peaceful for the first time in weeks. He knew that this night was very likely to be his last, but more than a year of fighting in China and England had given him a warrior's fatalism. He put his hands behind his head and smiled slightly in the darkness. Well, tomorrow he'd show them something.

If he had been British, this really wouldn't be necessary. His explanation would have been accepted readily and without bitterness, for mysterious, inexplicable things were always happening to pilots in the air. But the fact that he was an American and the thing that had happened to him had cost the lives of four British pilots had cast an entirely different light upon the matter.

The squadron had been returning to base after having, in conjunction with two other pursuit squadrons, successfully chased away a formation of Nazi bombers from a factory district to the

south. The 15th had two to their credit, and not having lost a single ship, they were feeling pretty cocky. Then, sweeping in from the Channel, a squadron of Messerschmitts had burst upon them. The vulture insignia on their fuselages announced them to be under the leadership of Eric von Thelm, the cunning, seemingly invincible Nazi ace.

Air war tactics of the present time are vastly different from what they were during World War I. Where once the fighting was an affair of individual, aerial combats, it is now one of formation, precision teamwork and co-ordination. At speeds of almost 400 miles per hour, everything happens with lightning-like rapidity, and the slightest mistake in timing can cause the doom of several comrade planes in a matter of seconds. That was what happened to Lennox.

The favorite maneuver of the 15th was to cruise along in an open V formation, flight commander in the lead, with a top guard flying some 500 feet above and another at an equal distance below. Upon engaging an enemy squadron, top and bottom guards would converge upon the leading enemy planes, their machine guns and wing cannon flaming a leaden hail of death. Usually, these leading enemy ships would go down in flames, and then the rest of the squadron, an actual flying wedge, would sweep into the break, raking with their guns on both sides as they roared by. This usually accounted for several more of the enemy, then the formation would break up into groups of two and go after the survivors—if any cared to remain for further combat, which they seldom did.

The 15th had swung around to face the onward hurtling Nazi ships. Lennox was top guard, O'Gilvey bottom guard. Flight commander Dick Halsey was leading the squadron.

AT A RADIOED command from Halsey, Lennox and O'Gilvey began their converging movement. Lennox knew a moment of exultation as his Spitfire screamed down toward the approaching Nazi Messerschmitts. Then he pressed the button in the control stick which electrically activated his guns—and his eager confidence exploded in sudden, utter horror. They remained silent, inactive.

Frantically, Lennox pressed that control button—again, again, and again, until his thumb was numb with the pain. But nothing happened. Desperately, he joggled the stick, even stamped with one foot on the bottom of the plane in the hopes that the shocks would untangle any snarl in the electrical connections that might have occurred. Again no results—and all the while the oncoming Messerschmitts roared closer. Streaks of flaming tracer began to lick toward the Spitfires.

Helpless because of the inactivity of his guns, there was only one thing left for Lennox to do, and he did it. He banked, climbed for altitude, and roared away from the battle.

Frustration, appall, rage, and grief raked him in a vicious cross-fire. At a safe distance, he circled to watch impotently the ensuing catastrophe to the 15th.

O'Gilvey roared up, his guns flaming. But the wiley von Thelm, seizing the opportunity offered by Lennox's withdrawal from the fight, led his Messerschmitts up and over the 15th's V formation. Then, with altitude and a rear position to their favor, the Nazis swooped down in what became simply a massacre. Flight commander Dick Halsey was among the first to go down in twisted, flaming wreckage, and, deprived not only of his cool sure leadership but of a battle tactic which had been effective so long as to have become

a habit, the Spitfires were demoralized into utter, senseless confusion. Only a little more than half managed to reach their hidden base again.

Lennox had explained to the wrathful pilots of the 15th, and for a moment they had believed him. Then one tried the apparently faulty guns in Lennox's Spitfire—and the resulting blast had all but knocked in one wall of the barn. There was nothing wrong with the guns, then, and a check-up of the electrical firing connections brought to light nothing which might have caused their silence during the battle over the Channel.

Called up before an official board of inquiry, Lennox repeated his story. He told it simply and without prejudice. Impressed by his earnestness and sorrow and his record of action in China and England, the board had released him without sentence or stigma. But Lennox had become an outcast among the pilots of the 15th. While not actually convinced that he was a coward, they taunted him as such, resenting the fact that he, an American, had been responsible for the deaths of four British fliers, innocent or not. The only one at the airdrome who sympathized with him was Benjie Callahan, the wiry, little mechanic who presided over the repair shop in the barn. This was because Benjie was a Free State Irishman and also a firm believer in Gremlins.

ACCORDING to Benjie, it was the Gremlins who were responsible for Lennox' downfall. And Lennox, grateful for the little Irishman's friendship, pretended to agree. Lennox had heard of the Gremlins before, of course, for they were a modern legend. No one knew just how or when it had originated, but tales of this mischievous little people of the air were already known to pilots the length and breadth of Eng-

land. The pilots of the 15th were no exception and had even made their own individual contributions to the form and content of the myth.

The nomenclature is slightly on the whacky side, but the Gremlins do not seem to mind. Male Gremlins are just that. Female Gremlins are called Fifi-nellas, little male Gremlins, Widgets, and little female Gremlins, Flipperty-Gibbets. These are the ordinary kind of Gremlins, but as might be expected, there are other varieties. Among these are Strato-Gremlins, Night-flying Gremlins, and Nautic-minded Gremlins.

To those who believe—like Benjie—it is the Gremlins who jam controls, clog oil lines, fog windows, cause gasoline leaks, strange engine disturbances, and other inexplicable technical mishaps. They are not intentionally mean, however, but just inquisitive and mischievous. In the latter mood, their favorite form of prey is the over-confident pilot, and in one way or another they always succeed in bringing about a swift return of his inferiority complex.

**L**ENNOX ate his usual solitary breakfast in the mess room. Later he wandered outside, and because no one seemed to be near the barn, he went in to see Benjie Callahan. Benjie was replacing a bullet-riddled aileron, and at sight of Lennox his wizened face split into a red-cheeked grin.

"Well, now, and how be ye this foine mornin'?" he greeted.

Lennox attempted a smile. "Foine," he answered. For a moment his loneliness impelled him to tell Benjie of his plan for redemption, but he thought better of it and instead asked. "See any Gremlins during the night, Benjie?"

"Me?" asked the little Irishman in surprise. "Faith, they wouldn't be a'showin' o' themselves to a groundling

like me, Mister Lennox. 'Tis only to pilots that they be seen."

"My mistake, Benjie. But, see here, haven't Hangar-Gremlins made their appearance yet?"

"And sure, now, who knows but one day they may?" Benjie's blue eyes were serious. "Evolution does strange things sometimes. Now I've an idea that—" And Benjie went on to tell Lennox of his special theory of evolution as applied to Gremlins.

Lennox listened with only half his attention. The other half was fixed upon the main building. He didn't have long to wait. Benjie was making the concluding statements of his discourse when the door opened and Carewe's orderly came briskly toward the barn.

The orderly made it a point to ignore Lennox, addressing Benjie as though he were the only person present. "Major's compliments. He says to wheel out a plane and check it. Special flight." With that, he turned and made off for the mess room.

Lennox waited, his body becoming taut with tension. Benjie went to round up his two Cockney assistants, and the trio trotted toward the field, where they pulled aside a camouflaging haystack to reveal the gleaming shape of a Spitfire. They swarmed over it, busy with tools. The orderly came out of the mess room followed by a pilot who was shrugging into a flying jacket, the chin strap of his helmet gripped between his teeth. They went into the main building together.

Lennox wore his own flying jacket, with his helmet stuffed into one of the pockets. Trying to appear casual, he strolled over to the Spitfire which was now in the final stage of its check-over, motors idling.

"Surprise!" Lennox told Benjie. "I'm the one who's taking her up. You were talking so much that I didn't get a

chance to tell you before."

"Well, now!" Benjie said, wonderingly.

And Lennox, as though he were on a mission of the utmost urgency, climbed into the cockpit and pulled on his helmet. He signalled for the chocks to be pulled away from the wheels.

Benjie hesitated a moment. Events did not seem quite right to him somehow. But he shrugged and relayed Lennox's order to his two assistants. The chocks came away and the mechanics moved into the clear. Lennox gunned the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, and the Spitfire taxied down the field, to take off seconds later into the clear, blue morning sky.

**C**LIMBING steadily for altitude, Lennox did not once look back. He knew that the roar of his motors had warned Carewe and that by now the squadron commander was signalling frantically for him to land. Carewe, of course, would have to put on a good act so that no suspicion would fall upon him later. He was. The earphones hanging from the instrument panel began to buzz urgently. Carewe was now trying to signal him by radio, but Lennox had not donned the earphones in anticipation of this and now he ignored them completely.

Lennox levelled off and pointed the nose of his Spitfire toward the Channel. The direction he was taking would lead him straight toward the sector patrolled by von Thelm. His lips tightened as he thought of the Nazi ace. He knew that his chances of coming out of the duel alive were so slim as to amount almost to nothing at all. Von Thelm already had more than a score of British ships to his credit, and these included not only the ones he had shot down while accompanied by his own squadron but also those he had bested in single com-

bat. In the latter case he had triumphed over many veteran British aces. Lennox had no delusions as to his own fighting abilities, for he knew that most of the men who had gone down under von Thelm's guns had been as good, if not better, than himself.

Lennox squinted ahead. In the distance he could now make out a thin, blue strip, swiftly widening, which marked the water of the Channel. It wouldn't be long, now. He tried to relax against the strain which was building up within him.

As a matter of habit, he glanced at his instruments. There was a sudden, strange flickering before his eyes. He thought it must be from the strain to which he was subjecting them and blinked rapidly several times. When he looked at the instruments again, he gasped in abrupt amazement, almost losing control of the ship.

Standing on the rim of the speed indicator was a bizarre, fantastic little figure. No more than six inches high, it wore a little, red jacket and brown corduroy pants, the bottoms of which were stuffed into tiny, black patent-leather boots with rubber suction soles. Tiny horns jutted from either side of its head, and between these, pushed back rakishly, was a green derby hat. It had a large, red nose and a wrinkled, brown face, which, at another time, might have worn an expression of grinning impishness, but which right now looked very sheepish and contrite.

**A**BRUPT memory of the stories he had heard from Benjie and others came back to Lennox. He knew on the instant just what it was he saw.

"A Gremlin!" he husked. "Heaven help me—a Gremlin!"

"Uh, huh," the little figure standing on the speed indicator affirmed timidly, in an astonishingly loud, bass voice.



"But—but you just can't be!" Lennox croaked. "Gremlins are just a lot of fairy-tale stuff."

A moment's trace of sardonic amusement came into the tiny, brown features. "You see me, don't you? And I could give you a sample of applied Gremlinology on your aircraft which wouldn't leave another doubt in your head, but there's no time for that. By way of introduction, I'm Gremlin Bob. We Gremlins have no names, you see, and sort of adopt the first name of the first person to see one of us."

"Yeah," said Lennox dazedly. "Yeah, I see." He licked his lips. "Well, what do you want? What're you doing here anyway?"

Gremlin Bob's pixie features became once more hang-dog. "I came to apologize. I—I'm the one who did it."

Lennox frowned in bewilderment. "Did what?"

"Jammed your guns."

"What!"

"Uh, huh."

"Then you're the one responsible for all the trouble I've had to go through!" Lennox snapped wrathfully. He made an abrupt grab for the tiny shape.

Gremlin Bob skipped nimbly to the altimeter dial and spread his hands imploringly. "Now wait a moment," he pleaded. "I know just how you feel, but let me explain."

"Explain!" Lennox snorted. "As if that would fix things up now."

"It was this way," began Gremlin Bob. "You and the others were all feeling so cocky that day after chasing away the bombers that I just couldn't resist the temptation to throw a little scare into you. When those Messerschmitts appeared, I jammed the electrical firing connections of your guns." He gestured placatingly as Lennox made another reach for him.

"Wait until you hear the rest of it,

won't you? The jamming was only meant to be temporary, please believe me. I'd intended to fix things up again, just as soon as you'd been frightened sufficiently. But just then a Fifinella happened along." Gremlin Bob looked as though his last statement finished the explanation.

But Lennox frowned. "Well?" he demanded.

Gremlin Bob grinned ruefully. "Fifinellas are female Gremlins, you'll remember, and—well, you know how we Gremlins are about Fifinellas. You pilots made us that way. This one was a peach, and as usual I forgot everything and went after her. By the time I remembered about you and the guns, the battle was over. I just managed to get them fixed up again before that pilot tried them at the drome."

"And now you're too late as usual," Lennox growled. "You know where I'm going now don't you?"

"Uh, huh. To fight von Thelm."

"Yes—and it's all your fault! Do you realize that my chances of coming out of the fight alive are almost none at all?"

GREMLIN BOB hung his head. "Uh, huh. But if there's anything I can do—"

"Do! Now?" Lennox grimaced in disgust. And then his eyes lighted. "Say—there *is* something you can do! Look here. Could you get into von Thelm's ship?"

Gremlin Bob brightened. "Easiest thing there is!"

"All right, then, here's what you can do. Get into von Thelm's ship and sort of complicate things for him. Don't jam his guns or anything like that, however, because I merely want the fight to be placed upon a more equal basis. Understand?"

"Uh huh," Gremlin Bob answered.

"What you want me to do is to handicap him, like in games or sports, where a skillful player handicaps himself so as to give an equal chance to another not as good."

Lennox nodded. "That's it. Only this handicap will be forced on von Thelm whether he wants the fight on an equal basis or not. And, if I know the Nazis in general and von Thelm in particular, he wouldn't."

"I'll take care of it," Gremlin Bob promised. Suddenly he darted up to the viewplate. "Oh, oh, here comes von Thelm now! So long."

There was a bright, blue flash, and when Lennox blinked the lights out of his eyes, Gremlin Bob was gone. Lennox compressed his lips into a thin, tense line, falling by force of long habit into his fighter's crouch. Down below glistened the waters of the Channel. And, diving out of the clouds with his guns flaming, came von Thelm.

Lennox side-slipped hastily and came around in a half circle. Von Thelm's Messerschmitt, with the vulture insignia on the fuselage, roared by, its guns spitting into empty space. But the Nazi had only been eluded for a moment. The nose of his Messerschmitt tilted abruptly skyward in an aerial somersault, and when he levelled out of it, he was diving down directly behind Lennox.

Lennox looped frantically, and none too soon, for the Nazi's bullets had already chewed several holes through the Spitfire's tail assembly. From then on, Lennox drew the fight into a chase, weaving, dodging, spinning, using every trick at his command to keep out of the line of the Nazi's guns. He wondered desperately how long it would take Gremlin Bob to handicap von Thelm, for minutes had passed already and as far as he could see, there was no lessening in the Nazi's skillful attacks.

And then there was the now familiar flickering before Lennox's eyes. When it had gone, there was Gremlin Bob, clinging to his perch on the rim of the speed indicator.

LENNOX stared in growing horror. Something was wrong—terribly, radically wrong. Gremlin Bob looked as if a tornado had struck him. His little immaculate clothes were disarranged and torn. His green derby was gone, and his left eye was black and swollen shut.

"Run for it!" Gremlin Bob gasped. "All hell's broken loose!"

"But what's the matter?" Lennox demanded. "Why didn't you handicap von Thelm as you were supposed to?"

Gremlin Bob took what seemed to be a deep breath. "We both overlooked something. The Nazis have Gremlins, too, you see. The one in von Thelm's aircraft is the nastiest customer I've ever run across. We English Gremlins feed on used postage stamps, but Nazi Gremlins drink stale beer—and well, it does something to their dispositions, not to mention their physique. The one in von Thelm's aircraft was a good nine inches tall, and he gave me to understand in no uncertain terms that he wouldn't have me practicing in his territory."

"Damn!" Lennox whispered in consternation. Without Gremlin Bob to help him, all his new-found hopes went crashing to destruction. He couldn't just run from von Thelm, for there was no place for him to go. To land now on English soil after what had happened would mean court martial and disgrace. To attempt to fight von Thelm with the Nazi in full possession of his power meant certain doom.

Lennox kicked rudder sharply as a line of flaming tracer cut suddenly across his windshield. In his disap-

pointed dismay, he'd forgotten that the Nazi ace was clinging tenaciously to his tail, and now von Thelm had almost managed to creep up beside him. Lennox rolled aside desperately, and there was a pattering, hail-like sound on his left wing. With a brief glance from the corner of his eye, he saw a neat line of black holes stretching along it. He dived, and then, with power full on, took up a course parallel to the Channel coastline. Scenting the unmistakable sign of a sure kill, von Thelm pursued relentlessly.

"We've got to do something!" Lennox gritted.

"Uh huh," answered Gremlin Bob. But what?"

Lennox had a sudden idea. "Look," he said. "Why don't you round up a gang of your Gremlin friends and then go after that Nazi Gremlin in von Thelm's plane? It ought to be a snap for a bunch of you to run him out. Then you could do whatever you wanted."

GREMLIN BOB shook his bare head. "Wouldn't work, I'm afraid."

"Why not?" Lennox demanded impatiently.

"You're forgetting that one Nazi Gremlin implies more. If I rounded up a gang, the Nazi Gremlin would round one up, too, and we wouldn't stand a chance with their size."

Lennox groaned, then bit his lip in desperate, aching thought. Of a sudden, he released a yell of triumph.

"I've got it!"

Gremlin Bob removed his hands from his battered eardrums and blinked his one good eye at Lennox. "Got what?" he wanted to know.

"The solution!" Lennox cried. "There's only one thing that could draw that Nazi Gremlin from von

Thelm's ship, and that's a Fifinella! Do you see?"

"I certainly do!" replied Gremlin Bob. He leered delightedly. "A Fifinella will turn the trick, if nothing else will." And with that, he vanished amid his usual bright, blue flash.

Lennox roared along for a time, at full speed. Frequent glances to his rear showed that von Thelm was still holding doggedly to the Spitfire's tail. Obviously, the Nazi hadn't had a solitary duel for such a long time that he was willing to pursue this latest victim to Kingdom Come just to break the monotony.

Lennox grinned. Well, this time von Thelm was going to get more than he had bargained for.

When Lennox judged that Gremlin Bob had had ample time to accomplish his task, he pulled back the stick, scolding the Spitfire into a wide, inside loop. Von Thelm's Messerschmitt flashed by, and then, realizing what had happened, the Nazi banked sharply and came around.

Lennox levelled just as von Thelm straightened out. For an instant the rear of the Messerschmitt was in his sights, and Lennox instinctively pressed the firing button in the stick. His guns thundered flaming tracer, and his mouth split in a wide grin as he saw a line of black dots crawl along the tail of the Messerschmitt and chew pieces out of the rudder.

The tight ball of tension in Lennox' stomach vanished, and his eyes lighted with confidence and hope. Things were evened up, now. Von Thelm was matched in a sky duel at last.

For long months later, the people along the Channel coast talked about that battle in the sky. It was a never-to-be-forgotten exhibition of cunning and skill. Again and again the Messerschmitt would pull out of some intricate

maneuver designed to catch the Spitfire in a trap, but always the Spitfire would dodge free, its guns striking into some new part of its opponent. The Spitfire was like a dog goading a vicious bull, grown clumsy in its rage. It harried, worried at the Messerschmitt until the Nazi ship was literally filled with holes. And then, as if unable to bear longer the clever, nimble series of dodges and nips to which it was being subjected, the Messerschmitt suddenly broke from the battle and roared out into the Channel.

But the Spitfire wouldn't allow the battle to end that way. It pursued the Messerschmitt until it whirled in blind, desperate fury. And the duel was suddenly over. For, as the Messerschmitt made an abrupt turn, the Spitfire swung up to meet it, its guns raking from engine housing to tail assembly.

For an instant, the Messerschmitt poised there in the sky as if unable to believe the doom which had come to it. Then, with black smoke curling from its damaged engine, it nosed down and fell, twisting and turning, into the Channel.

Von Thelm, the terror of northern English skies, was gone forever.

**I**T WASN'T until more than a month later that Lennox saw Gremlin Bob again. Lennox — Lieutenant Robert Lennox, now, and flight commander of the 15th—was returning from a special, secret conference at General Headquarters. It was evening, and the setting sun had stretched long streamers of red and gold across the horizon.

Lennox blinked at a sudden flicker before his eyes. And there was Gremlin Bob, seated on the rim of the speed indicator.

"Hello, there!" Gremlin Bob greeted.

"You!" exclaimed Lennox. "Where

have you been all this time?"

Gremlin Bob grinned slyly. He had on a new green derby, and his outfit of little red jacket and corduroy pants was once more immaculate.

"I've been busy raising a family," he answered. "Got the nicest crop of little Widgets and Flipperty-Gibbets you ever saw. I'll bring them around sometime."

"Do that," Lennox seconded, with a smile. "I'll be glad to meet them. But, say, I want to thank you for that favor you did me. Everything worked out beautifully. I got von Thelm, and the only inquiries that the inquiry board made later, were those as to how I had done it. Just look at the medals!"

Gremlin Bob looked. Then his little face screwed up into a grimace of puzzlement. "Favor? Thank me? What're you talking about?"

"Why, surely, you remember how you went after a Fifinella to draw that Nazi Gremlin out of von Thelm's plane?"

"Fifinella?" Gremlin Bob leered reminiscently. "What a cute, little trick she was! She's my wife, now, you know. But about von Thelm—" Gremlin Bob's features dropped in dismay, and then he lifted his green derby and scratched his bald head sheepishly.

"Well, what do you know!" he said.

"I clean forgot about it!"

"Forgot about what?" asked Lennox.

"About von Thelm," Gremlin Bob replied, with a rueful expression on his brown, pixie face.

"What!" choked Lennox.

"Uh huh. You know how we Grem-lins are about Fifinellas. Well, the one I went after to use on that Nazi Gremlin was such a swell little number that I just forgot about everything and went chasing after her myself!"

The End

"Nobody needs to know you aren't Stuporman any more. Don't tell her. She will never catch on. Go to her now. I bet she will be your slave for life."

Joe Blow takes this suggestion, nods, and beams. He walks out in the early morning sunshine with a smile on his face.

And sure enough, when he gets back to the office, Effie Fink falls all over him. The editor is proud, the subway contractor is overjoyed, and Joe Blow—the famous Stuporman—is a hero.

**L**EFTY FEEP finished wagging his tale and sat back.

I nodded.

"So that's how subways are built," I said, a little sarcastically.

"Joe Blow tells me all about it himself just now," Feep answered. "You do not think he is a prevaricator, do you? And certainly you know that I am 100% truthful."

"You're better than that," I told Feep. "Sometimes you're 200% at least."

He smiled at the compliment.

I turned to stare at skinny little bespectacled Joe Blow.

"Seems hard to believe that such a runt could do so many wonderful things," I sighed.

"You can see the subway for yourself. Doesn't that prove it?" Feep told me.

"I suppose so," I admitted. "But by the way, I forgot to ask you a question."

"Let's have it," said Lefty Feep.

"Why is your Stuporman friend wearing a bandage around his head?"

"Oh, that?"

Feep smiled as he replied.

"It seems he marries this girl Effie Fink, and she beats the hell out of him."

THE END