

STARTING TODAY: A thrilling new serial by

THE SLEEPING DRAGON

THE SIGN said, "Welcome to Suffolk." The soldier padded by it, his combat boots making little sound, the machine carbine slapping against his shoulder, keeping time with the grenades slung from his belt.

He was puzzled. From the moment he had awakened he knew what he must do. He must kill. Destroy. But the airfield that was to be his target was deserted, derelict. And so far he had seen no one. But he WAS ready. Ready to kill.

And then he came to the village.

He noticed the guard first, a thin man in a dark, unfamiliar uniform, going from house to house, knocking on doors, doubtless keeping the occupants alert. He took a careful aim, squeezed the trigger and . . . Sam Hurley, who had been postman in the village of Wentwick for 15 years, fell dead.

JOHAN STEED was first on the scene. But only just. A red Jag slammed to a halt alongside Steed's a second later and Mike Gambit and Purdey alighted; all three moved forward to look at the vil-

he said, "and when we question them it will all become clear."

"I already have." The voice brought them round to a man with the face of a tired bloodhound.

He was wearing a black eye-patch. "Questioned 'em all, and they all say the same thing," he said. "A Chinese soldier!"

EVEN at the range of a mile, the Chinese soldier could see the astonishment in Steed's face. Through the cross-wires of his telescopic sight.

His finger tightened on the trigger, but then he sat back. He was puzzled again. "Military targets first," those were his orders. But the tall, bowler-hatted figure, the handsome young man beside him, and certainly the slim, blonde, exquisitely made girl — they surely could not be military targets?

MAJOR FRANCIS tugged at his eye-patch. "It's a fact, Steed. A Chinik in full uniform. They came tumb-

broken village. Purdey raised an eyebrow. "Gambit, that's in very bad taste."

Steed crouched to scoop up some metal fragments. "It can't be the real Chinese," he said. "Not only are they all probably peacefully paddling their junks up the Yangtse, but this was a pin grenade."

"Very old fashioned. They have far more sophisticated equipment these days."

The Major's eye flickered. "That's a funny thing," he started to say, "because the uniform this chap was dressed in was . . ."

He stopped and turned, and they all stood under the blue, cloudless sky and listened to the rumble of what seemed like thunder.

THE Chinese soldier recognised the sound right away as mortar fire. He wasn't puzzled any more. He was happy.

He now knew exactly what he must do. He must join his comrades. Fight shoulder to shoulder. Kill. Destroy.

Steed's big green cat of a Jaguar made the running, with Gambit right behind. They both headed for the smoke now

flicked the wheel, jumped the ditch, ploughed through a five-barred gate, and continued across the field.

Gambit didn't have it quite so easy. "Hold on," he yelled at Purdey as he floored the throttle and hit the lowered tail-board of the trailer.

Later, Purdey was to tell him it was the louiest take-off she'd ever experienced (but as it was in a car, she was prepared to make allowances). But now, as the car crashed down on the other side of the roadblock, she brushed hay from her hair and looked at Gambit. "What did you do when you left school?" she asked sweetly.

Gambit fought to control the skid, side-swiped a telegraph pole and glanced at her. "Oh . . . er . . . I just knocked about a bit. Hitch-hiked across . . ." He spun the wheel, demolished a signpost, and finally straightened the car out. "I hitch-hiked across Europe."

"What a waste," mused Purdey, "when you might have been learning to drive."

THE mortar was glowing hot when the officer finally gave the order to cease fire. It was important not to waste ammuni-

STARRING THE NEW AVENGERS by BRIAN CLEMENS



gun fire shreds tires; the Steed's windows sliced the top of hat. The ditch was only just big enough to accommodate all four; they crouched, wincing as he thudded into it, but they don't bawl, they growl. "What about Steed, displaying bowler. "I don't know, frowned the

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Purdey whistled softly in astonishment: "It's been hit by a typhoon."

Steed stepped over a bullet-riddled corpse and pushed his umbrella through a shattered window. "This is war," he said, "the results of a pitched battle."

The broly described a semi-circle: "Bullet-pocked walls, grenade splinters, houses destroyed."

"Yes, but by whom?" asked Purdey. Steed smiled benignly. "Every war has its survivors."

he said, "and when we question them it will all become clear." "I already have." The voice brought them round to a man with the face of a tired bloodhound.

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MAJOR FRANCIS tugged at his eye-patch. "It's a fact, Steed. A Chink in full uniform. They came tumbling out of their houses as soon as they heard the shooting, and he chopped them down."

"Chop Suey," said Gambit as he again surveyed the

broken village. Purdey raised an eyebrow. "Gambit, that's in very bad taste."

Steed crouched to scoop up some metal fragments. "It can't be the *real* Chinese," he said. "Not only are they all probably peacefully padding their junks up the Yangtse, but this was a pin grenade."

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Steed's big green cat of a Jaguar made the running, with Gambit right behind. They both headed for the smoke now rising up beyond the hill ahead, both hitting more than the ton.

The roadblock was a surprise. A heavy tractor, a trailer full of hay, squarely across the road.

The Major clapped a hand over his one good eye as Steed

THE NEW AVENGERS

by **BRIAN
CLEMENS**

flicked the wheel, jumped the ditch, ploughed through a five-barred gate, and continued across the field.

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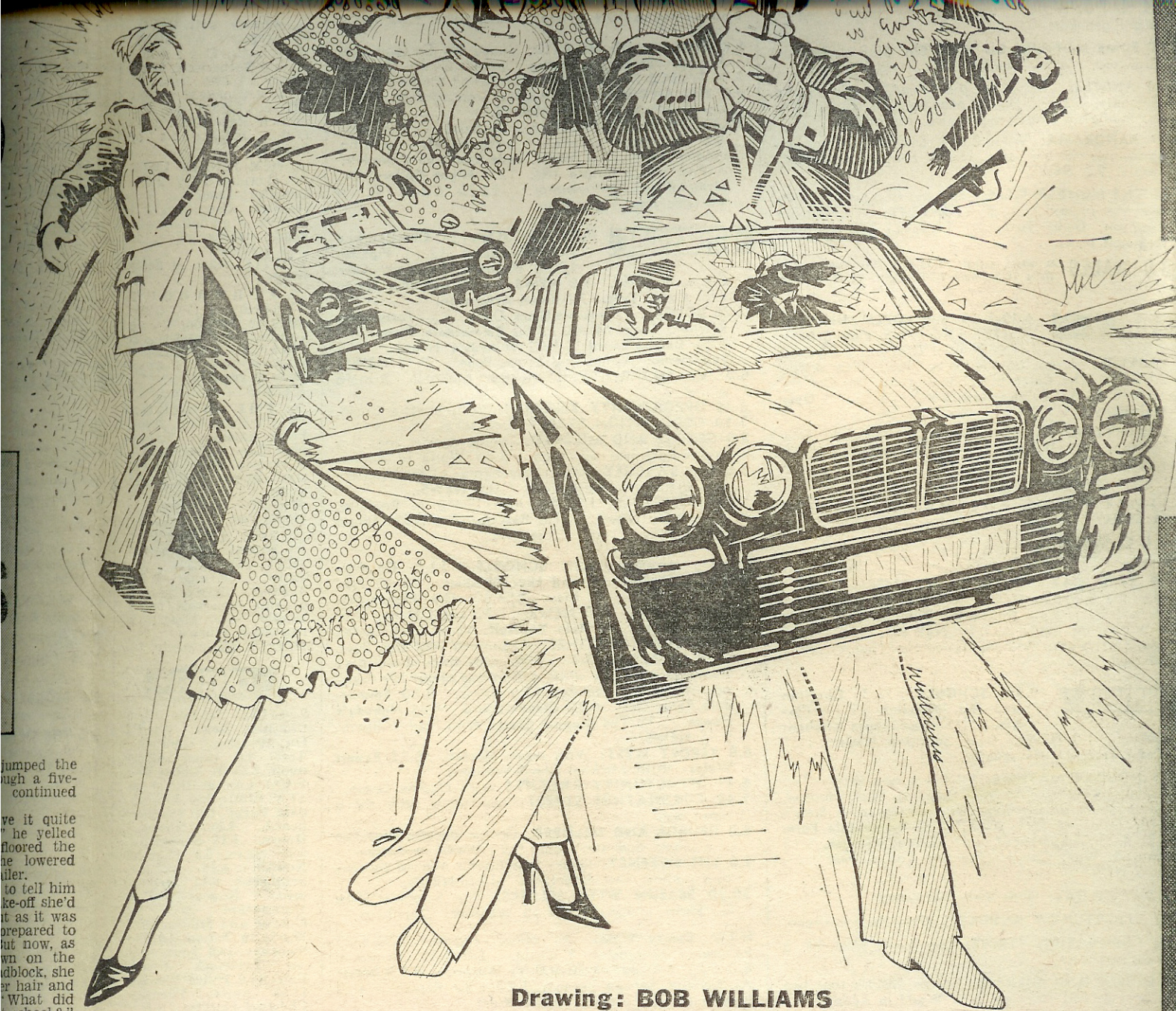
THE mortar was glowing hot when the officer finally gave the order to cease fire. It was important not to waste ammunition, and anyway, as he now surveyed the house through his binoculars he could see no sign of life.

How could there be? Nothing could have survived that bombardment. He had destroyed his target as instructed.

It was strange, though, that from the first moment of the attack there had been no sign of resistance. The Capitalists must have grown weaker over the years. He smiled at the thought, turned to order his men on, then stopped as he saw the cars coming over the hill.

The first burst of machine

TO your TV screens next week come "The New Avengers" led by the original Avenger, the immaculate, bowler-hatted John Steed, played by Patrick Macnee. With him will be leggy, lethal Purdey (Joanna Lumley) and Mike Gambit (Gareth Hunt, who played the footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*). Writer and co-producer of the series, Brian Clemens, has written this exclusive adventure of *The New Avengers* for *Mirror* readers.



Drawing: BOB WILLIAMS

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gun fire shredded Gambit's tyres; the next shattered Steed's windscreen and neatly sliced the top off his bowler hat.

The ditch was narrow and only just big enough to accommodate all four of them as they crouched there, Gambit wincing as he heard bullets thudding into his car. "I'll bet they don't honour the warranty," he groaned.

"What about this?" said Steed, displaying his shorn-off bowler.

"I don't understand it," frowned the Major.

"Nor do I," said Steed. "I have them specially made, and they're supposed to be bullet-proof."

"No, I mean that house they're attacking," the Major persisted. "I mean, why would they bother? The house is empty. Been empty for years!"

Having ordered a final burst, the officer and his men began to withdraw quietly.

He was satisfied, for hadn't he just destroyed the whole of British Military Security?

"British Military Security," the Major explained. "The house used to be their H.Q. but that was more than thirty years

ago. They've moved underground since then. That house has stood empty ever since."

"Shh!" interjected Gambit. "Listen, it's gone quiet." Gambit lifted his head higher, then scrambled out of the ditch, his Smith and Wesson ready.

GAMBIT stood for a long moment, looking, listening, and then turned to the others in the ditch. "It's OK," he said.

The flat crack of the sniper's rifle shocked them into immobility, and they stared as Major Francis, a neat hole drilled through the centre of his eye-patch, fell back into the ditch.

Steed and Gambit fell upon Purdey as one, dragging her to the ground with them. "Sniper," breathed Gambit. "Over there," Steed nodded. "That tree."

Gambit studied the tall tree about a hundred yards away.

"I reckon I could sprint there without him hitting me," he said.

Steed frowned. "Gambit, I don't doubt you could get there, but then what? Climb up? You'd be a sitting duck."

"That isn't what I had in mind," Gambit replied, and turned his full attention, every nerve and muscle in his body towards that tree.

Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he could hear again the voice of his karate master, urging him that anything was possible. "A man can run through an oak door, if he believes, if he concentrates."

THE Chinese soldier was amazed. The man must be crazy! He swung his gun round for a clearer shot.

Then Gambit hit the tree. Hit it such a blow with his shoulder that the wood splintered, and the tree shook.

The soldier flung out a hand too late, then suddenly he was falling from his perch, clattering down through the branches to land at Gambit's feet, his neck broken.

THE Avengers stared at the slant-eyed face of a mere boy, no more than 20, then Steed heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well he is Chinese, but that uniform must be thirty years out of date. At least he's not one of their army."

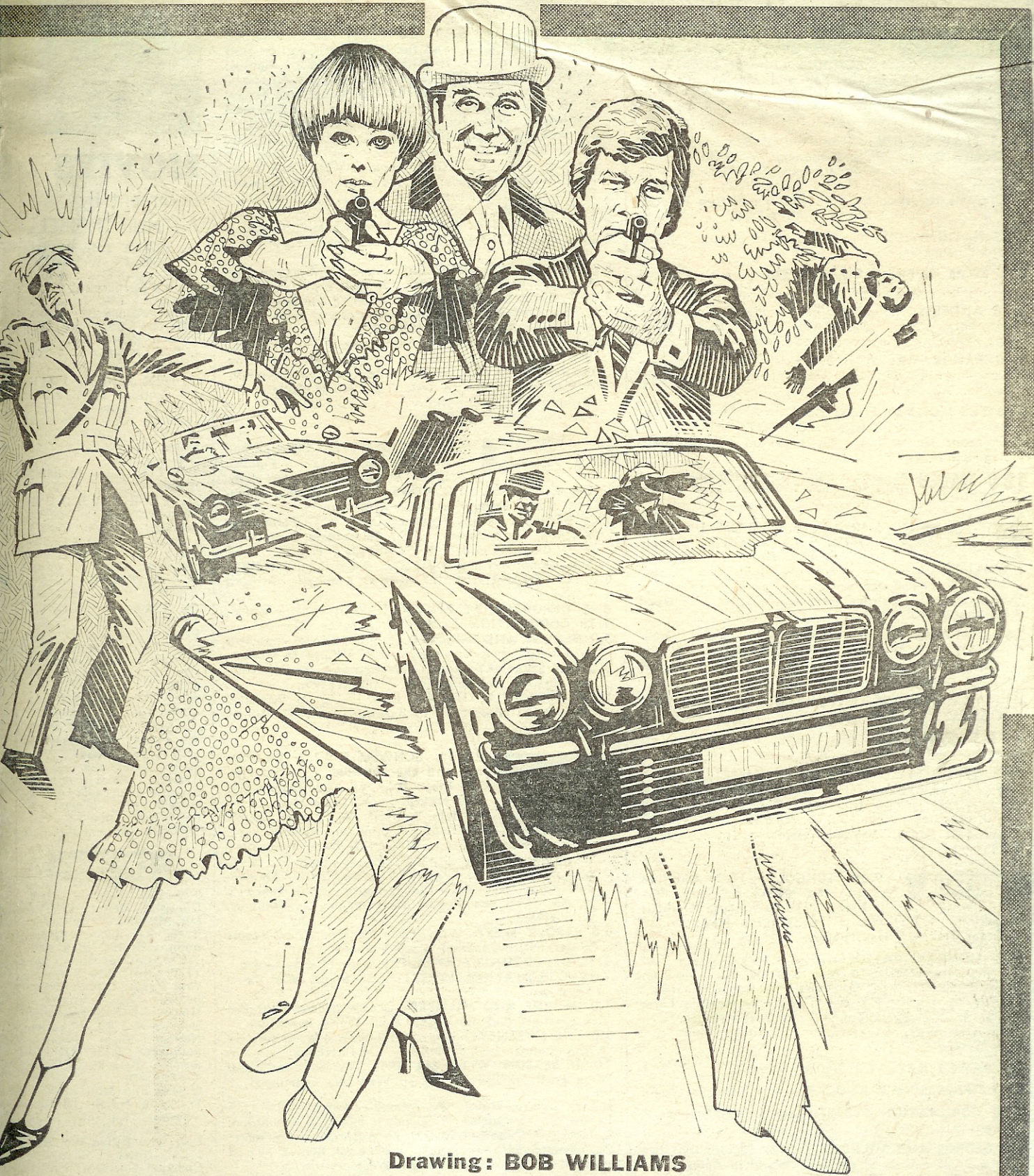
"Oh, but he is," corrected Purdey, opening the soldier's pay-book. "Private Foo Semoi of the Chinese People's Army. And that uniform isn't the only thing that's out of date."

She glanced again at the youthful features of the dead man. "According to this he was born in 1925. Which makes him 51 years old!"

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TOMORROW: The secret of Purdey's strange prisoner

by the writer of TV's Avenger series



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Day 2 of

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STARRING THE
NEW AVENGERS

CHINESE soldiers in out-of-date uniforms have attacked the peaceful Suffolk village of Wentwick. A young Chinese sniper killed by Gambit, Steed's assistant, has a paybook which would make him 51 years old . . .

PROFESSOR CHAMBERS smiled indulgently. "Fifty-one years old? Not a chance, Steed. I've examined him thoroughly, and that is the body of a man of about twenty."

Steed shivered. The morgue was, understandably, not the warmest of places. "Anything unusual about him at all?"

Chambers shook his head. "Perfectly normal—see for yourself." He pulled back the sheet, then stared in utter shock at the Chinese soldier. The hair was now grey, deep lines etched and eroded the face—the face of a man in his fifties!

MR. MARLOW was proud of her guest house.

The building itself had an illustrious history, and she liked to think she respected that.

It was always spick and span, and she was most careful about the type of person she rented rooms to, elderly, genteel people. That way she preserved the tranquillity of the place.

Mrs. Marlow hated noise. When she heard the first bang her first thought was the kitchen—a gas explosion.

As she rushed towards it, the second bang brought the ceiling crashing down on her. She didn't hear the third bang; she was already dead. She didn't hear the rattle of machine guns, or see the yellow faces at the shattered windows.

GAMBIT banked the helicopter low so that, momentarily, he and Purdey could see the white faces of the men in the trucks, British Commandos hurrying to the scene.

Seconds later they were hovering over the smoking remains of Mrs. Marlow's guest house. "There!" exclaimed Purdey, pointing to where a small group of men were hurrying towards the cover of wooded ground.

The group was headed by a Chinese officer, a mortar team struggling at the rear.

"How many?" snapped Gambit.

"Six."

Gambit fired a snap shot, saw one of the soldiers fall and grimly corrected: "Five."

He steadied the helicopter, took aim again, but Purdey pushed the gun aside. "We want them alive, Gambit."

He regarded her, then nodded and lifted the helicopter up and over the wood and prepared to put it down. The British Commandos were grim and angry as they heaved aside rubble and pulled out the dead and the wounded.

Their sergeant, the angriest of them all, turned to Steed. "For God's sake—why?"

Steed didn't hear him. He

STEEED SEES DEAD MEN GROW OLD

appeared—a Chinese officer, padding silently through the wood.

Purdey gently tapped him on the shoulder, and he spun round, shock draining his face. Purdey smiled. "You are supposed to be inscrutable," she told him, and as she spoke she kicked the carbine from his hands.

He was good. Very good. The knife appeared in his hand in a blur of movement. Purdey didn't look at it. "Their eyes," her instructor had urged, "always watch their eyes."

She did. They flicked, and he lunged at her. Purdey was a split second faster and the knife struck hard and deep into the tree.

Even as he tugged it out, Purdey rose on point, pivoted,

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by BRIAN CLEMENS

moment later Gambit thrust through the shrubbery to regard the scene. Purdey smiled: "I've found the way to a man's stomach. And it ISN'T his heart!"

THE Commando Sergeant stared at Steed,

mandos fell silent, watching as they let the Chinese officer slide from their grasp to lie among the debris, clutching his belly.

"He ran into my foot," Purdey explained. "I doubt he'll be able to ride his bicycle for a while."

"Never mind," said



Thirties, and for a moment thought . . ."

He returned his gaze to the Chinese. "I thought it was Toy Lai. I knew him well, but it can't be. If he were Toy Lai, he'd be older than I am!"

Steed nodded to the man who grabbed the carbine, jerked the ID discs from his neck and tossed them to Steed. The flat fibre discs clattered in the silence. They were worn smooth, but still legible: "Major Toy Lai."

The shock of realization gave the Chinese officer a chance. He slammed the sergeant across the face, grabbed the gun from his hand and kicked away from the room. "It is the duty of a prisoner of war to die," he said.

Purdey frowned. "War?"

The Chinese snapped the bolt. "It is also my duty to destroy the enemy, and you are certainly that!" His finger tightened on the trigger and . . . Gambit moved. Without seeming to move an inch, he shot the man with the gun deep into his pocket.

Major Toy Lai clattered the floor, dead, and Gambit said "Damn."

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Steed didn't hear him. He was studying the blue plaque that had been Mrs. Marlow's pride and joy, a plaque set into a wall and miraculously unscathed.

It read: "1940-46, this house was occupied by the Allied General Staff."

PURDEY knew the enemy was near. She had seen nothing, heard nothing, but she knew.

She pressed herself tighter against the tree. Then he

STEED SEES DEAD MEN GROW OLD



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She did. They flicked, and he lunged at her. Purdey was a split second faster and the knife struck hard and deep into the tree.

Even as he tugged it out, Purdey rose on point, pirouetting like the ballerina she had once been, her skirt lifting high, exposing the top of a stocking, the white of a thigh, the suggestion of panties and a rose pink suspender, and then the officer felt the power of her small elegant foot.

Purdey struck carefully because they wanted him alive. Struck carefully, and low. His eyes crossed as fire invaded his groin, fire, followed by a terrible, nauseous pain that dumped him at her feet. He vomited. Then he became unconscious. A

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THE Commando Sergeant stared at Steed. "The first attack came at the village of Wentwick," said Steed, "and just down the road from Wentwick is an airfield. Oh, it's derelict now, but once upon a time it was a very important airfield indeed. Did you know that?"

The sergeant blinked. "I do now, sir," he said.

Purdey and Gambit half-carried their prisoner into the area; around them the Com-

mandos fell silent, watching as they let the Chinese officer slide from their grasp to lie among the debris, clutching his belly.

"He ran into my foot," Purdey explained. "I doubt he'll be able to ride his bicycle for a while."

"Who is he?" asked Steed. "Toy Lai!"

They turned towards the thin voice and the survivor the sergeant was supporting, a frail old man with a military moustache. He shuffled over to the Chinese officer. "Toy Lai?" he repeated, disbelievingly.

Steed gripped his shoulder. "Do you know this man?"

The old man's eyes clouded, then he straightened into a semblance of military bearing. "I am Brigadier East, sir. Long retired. I was attached to Peking in the

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TOMORROW: Steed falls to the assassin's gun

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The shock of realisation gave the Chinese officer his chance. He slammed the sergeant across the throat, grabbed the gun from his hand and kicked away across the room. "[It is the duty of a prisoner of war to escape," he said.

Purdey frowned. "What war?"

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Major Toy Lai clattered to the floor, dead, and Gambit said "Damn."

"Never mind" soothed Purdey, looking at the smoking hole in Gambit's jacket pocket. "It can be invisibly mended."

"You wanted him alive, Steed. I'm sorry."

Steed crouched by the dead man. "Perhaps he told us something."

He rose to his feet. "If this was Toy Lai then he's thirty years too late—like the targets they've been attacking. Targets that were important once, thirty years ago, but not any more."

He swung round to the old

brigadier, "Is this Major Toy Lai?"

The old man hesitated. "My memory isn't what it was, but it looks very like him and . . . Oh, God! He stepped back in alarm from the body of the dead Chinese. The hair was already white and, as they watched, lines furrowed the brow, the eyes sank back into the sockets, the cheeks caved inwards. Within seconds the body became that of a very old man.

STEED had never seen Professor Chambers so agitated. "Total degeneration," said the professor.

"There's another thing . . ." Chambers held up an X-ray plate. "Look at this, surgically buried at the base of the brain."

Steed looked at a small object, a dark shape among the shadows of the X-ray. "What is it?"

Chambers' eyes had the glint of a man playing an ace: "Some kind of radio receiver!"

THE Chinese Ambassador's usually deep ochre face had paled to light primrose as he listened to the Security Man. "We will have to inform Steed," he said.

The Security Man shook his head. "To do that would be to lose face. No, we must wait and see what happens."

Wait and see what happens? The Ambassador knew what would happen: if he didn't tell Steed, within a few hours the world would be plunged into World War Three!



CHINESE soldiers, all sharing the secret of eternal youth, have attacked Britain; their main targets, former nerve centres of our Second World War offensive. British commandos are hunting the invaders while Steed, Purdey and Gambit add their bizarre talents to the search. But, in London, the Chinese Ambassador foresees the start of World War Three—unless he tells Steed all . . .

ENTER A KILLER IN A PACKING CASE

STEED was worried. The "Yellow Peril," as the papers had dubbed it, was over. British Commandos had found and attacked small groups of Chinese soldiers across the country, and destroyed them all.

The bodies, rapidly ageing, were now being counted and questions were being asked. "Some new form of terrorism?" The question might never be answered.

But Steed was still worried. "Furrows under the bowler," Gambit told Purdey.

"He's either worried or very, VERY ill. Do you know he missed the Test match at Lord's?"

There was only one person more worried than Steed. The Chinese Ambassador. He, too, was haunted by an unanswered question: Where was Hi Ling?

Captain Hi Ling yawned. He had slept well, and now he was awake and feeling refreshed. He yawned again, luxuriously stretched his arms; and encountered wood on either side!

For a moment he panicked, thinking he was in a coffin, buried alive, but then he realised that there was some light filtering through a crack in the crate, and then he remembered.

Remembered he was a Commando First-Class, and that to him had been entrusted the most important target of all. He reached up to find and pull the release catch.

It was Purdey, who discovered it.

Checking through a killed Chinese officer's effects for the tenth time, she found it concealed in his shoe; a ticket. From Turner's Depository. A claim ticket for "one crate," date-stamped 1946.

Hi Ling fastened the top button of the Savile Row suit, gave the bowler a tap and reminded himself he must buy a carnation. For didn't the English always wear

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The depository was a big, dark barn of a building and she was convinced that any moment a rat would scuttle over her feet, and she would scream. And why shouldn't she? "After all, I AM a woman."

"Amen to that," Gambit grinned at her through a gap in the packing cases piled high all round.

Purdey looked at him archly. "I was talking to myself."

Gambit considered this, then nodded: "I suppose that way you DO meet a better class of person. I've found what we were looking for."

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Gambit nodded. "Long range charge, explosive tip," he looked at her in dismay. "An assassin's bullet."

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Drawing: BOB WILLIAMS

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The search. But, in London, the Chinese Ambassador foresees the start of World War Three—unless he tells Steed all . . .

KILLER IN

A PACKING CASE



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STEED was worried. The "Yellow Peril," as the papers had dubbed it, was over. British Commandos had found and attacked small groups of Chinese soldiers across the country, and destroyed them all.

The bodies, rapidly ageing, were now being counted and questions were being asked. "Some new form of terrorism?" The question might never be answered. But Steed was still worried. "Furrows under the bowler," Gambit told Purdey.

"He's either worried or very, VERY ill. Do you know he missed the Test match at Lord's?"

There was only one person more worried than Steed. The Chinese Ambassador. He, too, was haunted by an unanswered question: Where was Hi Ling?

Captain Hi Ling yawned. He had slept well, and now he was awake and feeling refreshed. He yawned again, luxuriously stretched his arms, and encountered wood on either side!

For a moment he panicked, thinking he was in a coffin, buried alive, but then he realised that there was some light filtering through a crack in the crate, and then he remembered.

Remembered he was a Commando First-Class, and that to him had been entrusted the most important target of all. He reached up to find and pull the release catch.

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Hi Ling fastened the top button of the Savile Row suit, gave the bowler a tap and reminded himself he must buy a carnation. For didn't the English always wear carnations?

He picked up the umbrella. He was particularly proud of this. It looked and felt like an ordinary umbrella, no hint at all that through the centre ran a high power rifle.

He swung it jauntily. He was ready for Whitehall!

Purdey hated rats. She could stand up to an

armed killer (and had). — but rats . . .!

The depository was a big, dark barn of a building and she was convinced that any moment a rat would scuttle over her feet, and she would scream. And why shouldn't she? "After all, I AM a woman."

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He hadn't wished Steed the blessing of many sons. Hadn't hoped that Steed's great-grandmother was happy in Heaven. He hadn't even bowed! For a moment Steed thought the ambassador must be off his turnip!

But the sweat couldn't be faked, nor the desperation in features trained to remain unreadable.

"The odds were a billion to one." Steed could not make sense of it right away. "The makers of the satellite guaranteed it. Twelve of them have been



Drawing:
BOB WILLIAMS

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"It was probably one small transistor," the ambassador continued. "It tailed, fused, and triggered off a circuit that should not have been triggered. Not yet anyway. Perhaps never."

THE security man prowled to the rear of Steed's house until he heard the sing-song intonation of his ambassador's voice. He drew his gun, and screwed the silencer into place.

He was one of the old school; never draw a gun unless you intend to use it.

Steed stared at the ambassador, stunned for a moment by what he had been told. The ambassador broke the small

silence: "Hi Ling is the biggest danger. HE is the man who can plunge our countries into war."

"Hi Ling?"

The ambassador nodded frantically. "You must find him and stop him! Hi Ling's target is . . ." The ambassador gripped his belly and folded forward, and for one mad moment Steed thought: "He's bowing at last."

Then he saw the blood and turned to where the security man stood at the open window. Their eyes met briefly and then the gun kicked a second time, spitting flame, but making no noise as the security man shot Steed (through the heart!).

Steed fell heavily, taking his collection of

cavalry helmets with him. Gambit stood with finger poised to ring the bell when he heard the clatter.

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"Stay back," he barked, "or the girl dies."

Gambit shook his head: "You're going to have to kill us both anyway." The security man grinned: "That's right."

It was crazy. A bullet travels upwards of a thousand miles per hour, straight and true. Nevertheless a bullet could be deflected, or could it?

A FRACTION before he saw the gun muzzle flash, Gambit brought the palm of his hand sharply across his body, he felt a numbing shock,

TOMORROW: The desperate race against time

STARRING THE NEW AVENGERS



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by **BRIAN CLEMENS**

heard the bones of his hand splinter, and the whistle of the bullet as it ricocheted past!

The security man's jaw dropped, momentarily his grip relaxed and Purdey back-heeled him. Hard.

He grunted, she twisted, chopped the gun from his hand and then brought over a right cross that knocked him cold.

She ran to where Gambit stood clutching his broken hand, "Gambit, that was the stupidest, most ridiculous, most beautiful thing I ever saw!" She lifted the hand: "Are you all right?"

"Just," he replied wryly, "but my days of violin playing are over."

"Thank goodness for that." Then, as one, they looked at the security man, the silenced gun, and "Steed!"

Purdey was the first into the room, to step past the huddled figure of the ambassador and run to where Steed lay.

She turned him over, to stare in horror at the neat bullet hole in his immaculate jacket, "Straight through the heart. Oh, Gambit!"

They gazed down on the man they had loved and respected. "He taught us everything we know," said Gambit.

Purdey nodded, fighting her tears; "He was good and honest and true and

"he's still alive!"

"He can't be," said Purdey. "How CAN he be. Why?"

"Because I'm a gentleman," Steed blinked and

friends who foolishly do."

He held up the cigarette case, dented and buckled where the bullet had hit it.

Purdey flung her arms around him and hugged him close. Steed patted her head.

"Can we continue this some other time?" he climbed to his feet and looked at the dead ambassador. "We have to get our priorities right, and much as I enjoy being in your arms, Purdey, I think stopping World War Three should come first, don't you?"

He stripped off his jacket and covered the ambassador.

"He was a good man, he came to warn me, and it cost him his life."

"Warn you of what?" asked Gambit.

Steed sadly shook his head. "He never quite told me. He mentioned a name, Hi Ling, and an important target."

"That's all right then." They looked at Purdey. "Well, all the targets so far have been thirty years out of date, haven't they? So, nothing to worry about."

Gambit felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck.

"Steed, we found an assassin's bullet." Steed frowned. "So?"

"An assassin's bullet, and there is ONE target that never changes. One target who's been in the same spot for the last century!"

Hi Ling was having a happy day. He had chosen to stroll down Whitehall, spent an informative hour in the War Museum, looked at the Cenotaph, and now he stood among the other tourists, clutching his lethal umbrella.

He was slightly dis-



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"Because I'm a gentleman," Steed blinked and as they stood by, amazed and overjoyed, he sat up, rubbing his chest, and wagging a finger at Gambit.

"I told you a proper upbringing had its virtues." He reached into his jacket. "I don't smoke cigarettes myself, but, being a gentleman, I carry some for my

friends who foolishly do."

He held up the cigarette case, dented and buckled where the bullet had hit it.

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He was slightly disappointed. The house was not so very impressive, in fact, for a moment, he thought he might have the wrong address.

But the sign was clear enough: "Downing Street". And that was Number Ten.

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first time

RACE AGAINST THE CLOCK

by **BRIAN CLEMENS**

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look like?" demanded Gambit.

"Dressed like a gentleman, bowler, umbrella, but his clothes did seem a bit old-fashioned."

Steed turned to stare hopelessly at Whitehall, crowded now with rush-hour traffic and people hurrying home.

HI LING lowered himself into the Thames; stripped to his shorts, the water struck cold. It was almost dark now, behind him the lights of the Embankment were snapping on.

Ahead of him was the dark bulk of the House of Commons. He struck out towards it, carrying the precious umbrella in his teeth.

Steed hurried back to where Purdey and Gambit stood. They shook their heads, they had seen nothing.

"Right," said Steed, "he'll be leaving for the House soon, we'll be spreading ourselves thin, but we'll have to cover the route between us. Gambit, you stay here. Purdey, take the Square." He turned and stared off grimly: "I'll take the House of Commons".

Easy

The security of the perimeter had been easy. They relied too heavily on dogs. Hi Ling had killed the first alsatian with a single blow; the second had drawn blood, but he had broken its back and tossed it into the river.

Now, panting heavily, he took stock. He might only have the chance of one shot, so he had to have a clear view. From somewhere high. He looked up. And up. And then he saw the mouth plastic

the entrance of the House was perfect.

He could not possibly miss. He stripped the outer covering of the umbrella away to reveal the lightweight, high-powered rifle. He loaded it, set the sights, and then relaxed.

IT WAS relaxing up here, nothing save a large, yet gentle, ticking.

Gambit looked at his watch, then stepped aside as the limousine glided past, so slowly that he could clearly see the Prime Minister in the rear seat.

Hit

Gambit looked at his watch again; it showed 8.10. Nothing wrong with that, it was the correct time, and yet something nagged at his mind.

And then it hit him! Running now, he pulled out his radio and shouted into it: "Steed!"

Steed, standing in the shadow of the House, answered immediately: "Come in, Gambit."

Gambit's voice bounced as he sprinted along: "The clock. Steed, the clock."

"What clock?"

Cars braked and skidded and horns hooted as Gambit weaved through the traffic. "Big Ben! It's past eight, and it didn't chime!"

STEED spun round to stare up at the illuminated face of the famous clock high above him. So high that it commanded THE perfect view of the Square below!

Hi Ling saw the official car as it turned in from Whitehall; he was already crouching behind his telescopic sight, and then the car was held up by

didn't care, because his footsteps continued relentlessly receding upwards.

Steed stood, his chest heaving as he looked up at that last ladder, and the open mouth of the trapdoor. Then, bracing himself, he started up again.

The car had finally drawn up, and as a uniformed man moved to open the door, Hi Ling pulled the rifle close to his cheek, his finger curling tightly around the trigger.

He heard the sound behind him, turned, saw the bowler hat lifting higher through the trap door, and fired. Steed fell back out of sight, and Hi Ling swung back on target again.

THE jolt tore every muscle in Steed's arm, but he held on, clinging to the rung of the ladder, bleeding from a neck wound and desperately putting his finger to his lips.

Purdey froze, staring up at Steed hanging precariously above her, watching as he painfully pulled himself up again, and then took off his bowler hat.

Clear

The Prime Minister was clear in Hi Ling's sights, nodding and smiling as he moved to enter the House of Commons.

Steed flicked the bowler, as a child flicks a cigarette card; but no child could have sum-



AN invasion of Britain by Chinese soldiers, all apparently sharing the secret of eternal youth, has been crushed. But one invader has escaped. Capt. Hi Ling is loose in London, disguised as a City gent. Steed, Purdey and Gambit believe his target is the Prime Minister. . . .

STEED knew they didn't believe him. In fact, as he spoke, he hardly believed it himself! "Agents planted here thirty years ago; guerilla fighters to be activated a few hours before open conflict began and strike at important targets behind our lines. Awakened from a scientifically induced sleep, by a radio signal from a satellite to a transmitter buried in the brain.

He could feel their doubt now. "Something went wrong with that satellite and now, gentlemen, we are fighting an accident!"

The Defence Minister cleared his throat, "Their ambassador told you this?"

Steed nodded. "But their ambassador is dead". The Minister smiled at his colleagues. "I see no sense in alarming the PM over an UNconfirmed report. We'll send a memo to Security, of course, tell them to tighten up . . ."

Steed clattered down the Ministry steps three at a time; Purdey, then Gambit, his broken hand swathed in bandages, fell into step beside him: "What happened?"

Steed sighed, "Bureaucracy! We're on our own now!"

Hi Ling smiled at the policeman: "Will the illustrious man be making an appearance today?"

Plain

"He bloody well better had!" The big man who shouldered past Hi Ling was the Home Secretary, a man noted for his plain speaking. As the door of Number Ten closed on him, the policeman explained to Hi Ling: "Important debate in the House tonight. The PM has to be there."

Steed pulled into the kerb, and they studied Downing Street.

"It's like looking for a needle in a hay-stack", Purdey protested.

"Not quite", replied Steed. "Don't forget the eye of THIS needle will be slanted". He gestured at the tourists milling around the famous street; the Americans with their cameras, the tall, bowler-hatted man striding away as though he had a train to catch. "Not a Chinaman in sight".

Hi Ling twirled his umbrella as he walked past Steed's car. Now all he had to do was buy a few magazines and find the face of the man he had to kill.

Odd

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"Steed!" began Gambit. "They wouldn't be so stupid." Purdey contined, "to send an obvious Chinaman in to do the job!"

Steed snapped, already opening the door and hurrying down to the policeman who stood outside Number Ten. "Seen anything unusual?"

The policeman frowned: "No, sir. Except..."

Steed grabbed his shoulder: "Except what?"

"There was a chap a few moments ago, referred to the PM as the 'illustrious man,' that struck me as odd."

"This man, what did he

THE CL

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Now, panting heavily, he took stock. He might only have the chance of one shot, so he had to have a clear view. From somewhere high. He looked up. And up. And then his mouth, the mouth plastic surgeons had worked so hard to make European, split into a toothy grin that was pure Chinese.

The Security men were laughing at Steed. He could feel it as he turned his back on them and paced twice around the House of Commons. And found nothing.

He looked across the brightly-lit square to where Purdey stood, frantically looking at every face that passed, and finally shaking her head at Steed.

Hi Ling settled into his perch; the view across London was magnificent. Better still, the view down to

the entrance of the House was perfect.

He could not possibly miss. He stripped the outer covering of the umbrella away to reveal the lightweight, high-powered rifle. He loaded it, set the sights, and then relaxed.

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STEEP spun round to stare up at the illuminated face of the famous clock high above him. So high that it commanded THE perfect view of the Square below!

Hi Ling saw the official car as it turned in from Whitehall; he was already crouching behind his telescopic sight, and then the car was held up by piling traffic, and he sat back again and waited.

It was very quiet now, and he was glad that he had jammed the bell mechanism of the clock. The vibrations as it struck might easily have spoiled his aim; and he had the most important target of all.

Purdey had seen Steed turn and run into the building, and followed him. Now she found herself toiling up endless stairs.

Twice she stopped and called out to Steed, but either he didn't hear, or he

didn't care, because his steps continued receding upwards.

Steed stood, heaving as he looked that last ladder, and the mouth of the trapdoor bracing himself, he up again.

The car had finally up, and as a uniform moved to open the door, Ling pulled the rifle to his cheek, his finger tightly around the trigger.

He heard the sound him, turned, saw the hat lifting higher through trap door, and fired, fell back out of sight. Ling swung back on again.

THE jolt tore muscle in Steed but he held on, clinched the rung of the ladder, bleeding from the wound and desperate, putting his finger to his lips.

Purdey froze, staring at Steed hanging precariously above her, watching painfully pulled him up again, and then took his bowler hat.

Clear

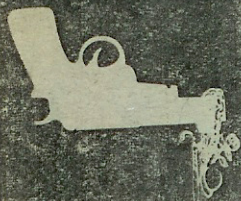
The Prime Minister clear in Hi Ling's sight, smiling as he tried to enter the House of Commons.

Steed flicked the barrel, a child flicks a cigarette, but no child could have



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moned such utter strength, such determination.

The hat scythed through the air spinning as its steel edge struck Hi Ling at the base of the skull. Struck, and embedded into it.

Hi Ling was already dead as he fell back, pulling the trigger; the bullet slamming into the huge, famous bell.

Glum

The Prime Minister stopped and looked up as Big Ben struck one. Yet the hands stood at 8.15.

He turned and playfully nudged the Minister of Works in the ribs: "That's one down to YOUR boys," he chided, turning to enter the House.

Purdey lay full length on the floor of Steed's study, surrounded by newspapers; she propped up on one elbow and regarded the glum faces

of Steed and Gambit. "I've been through the Honours List twice, and not a single knighthood for either of you!"

"Not even the teeniest OBE?" asked Gambit.

"That settles it!" Steed said firmly. "I am definitely not voting for HIM again!"

Purdey's laugh was like silver bells: "Steed, you old fraud, you know you didn't vote for him in the first place!"

Steed grinned: "I was thinking of it," he said. "Come on, the champagne's on ice and a magnum should be just enough for three."

THE END

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