



Illustrated by
C. B. Mayshark

The Blandom came in again, its guns flaming, and the monoplane staggered. Then came a muffled explosion. "Halgar!" said the man in the scarlet mask.

Guns of the Griffon

THRILLING MODERN AIR NOVELETTE

By Arch Whitehouse

BEGINNING A NEW SERIES OF MODERN AIR STORIES!

THE chant of a brassy orchestra was cut off halfway through the triumphant finale. Amused faces around a million loud speakers turned inquiringly. Why had this program been so suddenly halted? There was the indescribable silence that seems to stiffen everything—a silence that presaged a startling announcement. Some frowned with disappointment. Others leaned forward anxiously. Another jail break? Another shipwreck? Another

air disaster?

There was a faint click in the speaker now. A nationwide hook-up was going into action. No one could remember an announcement of an address from the Chief Executive. Could this mean

Then it came, the anxious but clear voice of a noted station announcer who could handle important lines.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we take this

opportunity to break into this program for an important announcement. This is particularly for the police in key cities in the eastern states. It is from the office of the Department of Justice in New York City. It reads as follows: 'Police, Coast Guard and other such agencies are advised that the man known only as the Griffon is at large again. This evening he shot and killed Richard Marsh, chief designer of the Gervais Aircraft Corporation at Farmingdale, Long Island. He also bombed and destroyed a section of the Gervais plant, destroying equipment and a number of fighting planes under construction for the U. S. Government, and then apparently escaped in a plane which is believed to have headed out to sea.

"All airport operators are advised to warn their local police officials via teletype should any suspicious planes land on their fields, seeking fuel or service. No details of this ship are available."

"An addition to this message reads as follows: 'The Chief of Police of New York wishes Mr. Kerry Keen, the noted ballistics expert, to report to Police Headquarters as soon as possible.' That is all, ladies and gentlemen. For further details of this strange case, read your local newspapers"

EXACTLY one hour before this strange announcement went out over the three big networks, a trim-winged monoplane had slipped out of the eastern sky and nosed down for the Gervais field at Farmingdale, Long Island.

The ship had a deep-bellied bullet body, and a glass cowling that completely covered the two cockpits. Beneath the wings hung two single-step floats that housed amphibian wheels set in watertight boxes beneath the forward leg of the undercarriage leg. There were also small wheels set inside the water rudders, and a tail-wheel under the fin. In the nose, snug under clean streamline plates, hummed a 1,000-h. p., sixteen-cylinder, Avia W-44 water-cooled engine of Czechoslovakian manufacture. The cylinders were set "W" fashion in three banks of six, and conformed beautifully with the smart lines of the nose.

As the plane skimmed across the countryside, the man in the pilot's cockpit drew back his throttle and then eased in a long steel lever mounted on a steel plate below the throttle quadrant. Instantly the roar of the big motor was cut off. The exhaust had been directed through Skoda mufflers mounted in the thick wing roots.

Nothing but the low wail of the slipstream knifed by the cantilever wing, and the slash of the steel prop blades could be heard. The silver and black monoplane nosed down into an easy glide, set its nose dead for the grayish runway and slipped into the private field like a ghost. With the mufflers still in, the pilot ran her gently up to the great hangar door, opened the coupe top and stepped out onto the wing.

The motor purred as smoothly as a Cadillac.

"Shut her off," the pilot said quietly. "Keep your foot on that Viet pressure starter and be ready to move fast."

The man in the back seat slipped up front to the pilot's pit. The pilot dropped off the wing, pivoted fast on his left foot and planted a fist with deadly accuracy on the stubby chin of a watchman. He reached forward and grabbed him before he fell, and within twenty seconds had him gagged and bound. He threw him across his shoulder and ran for the hangar door.

Quietly opening a small entrance cubby, he dropped the man under the wing of a ship and started for the hangar office in the opposite corner. He drew up his goggles, reached in his pocket and pulled out a small scarlet mask, which he carefully fitted across the upper part of his face. Then he crept silently along the wall and listened carefully. Someone inside was apparently talking into a phone.

"Yes," the voice complained. "Everything is clear Yes, it came okay. You can go ahead, but make it smart. I'm clearing out right away Yes, everything was all right. I just looked it over. I'm heading back for New York. See you in Washington, Thursday Right."

The man in the scarlet mask smiled grimly. Drawing a pistol out of his pocket, he flexed his fingers that were encased in thin rubber gloves, and shoved the door open. The man inside was talking into a radio microphone. The wave-length lever was set to 89—an unusual band, the man in the scarlet mask observed.

"Who the hell are you?" the man at the radio table growled. He stared into the black orifice of the gun, and gasped.

"That envelope in your pocket, Marsh," the man in the scarlet mask answered quietly. "Hand it over, quickly!"

MARSH jerked himself back from the desk as the intruder stepped forward and snapped the switch of the set, cutting it out. Then, with a quick movement, the man with the gun jammed his left

hand inside the other man's coat and whipped out a long, brown manila envelope. He stuffed it inside the map pocket of his Byrd-cloth flying coat.

"Now, my friend, you have trapped yourself beautifully, eh?"

"Can't we get together on this?" Marsh asked faintly. "I'll go halves with you."

"Halves? Why should I?" the man in the mask taunted. "I have it all."

"Well, what are you going to do? Who are you, anyway?"

For answer, the man in the mask flipped a small white card out of his pocket and skimmed it across to Marsh. It fell face up. Marsh's eyes widened as he saw engraved thereon a strange animal—half-eagle, half-lion. That was all.

"The Griffon!" Marsh husked.

"The Griffon," smiled the man in the mask. And you want me to go halves with you. Rather a laugh, oh? No, the Griffon's on the prowl against you, and you're caught. Of course, there is a way out, a nice easy way. It does away with all that publicity and court-room business, the testimony over the radio, flaring headlines. Perhaps life. Perhaps—and most likely the firing squad. These papers in this envelope, you know."

"You can't do this," Marsh roared. "You're as big a crook, yourself."

"That's unkind, considering that I am going to give you a chance for an easy way out," the Griffon said. "Here's a nice automatic, with one shot in it. You take it in your left hand, and use it. They will never know what really happened."

The Griffon placed the heavy automatic pistol in Marsh's left hand. The aircraft designer stared at it, wild-eyed. The Griffon watched the man closely.

"Come, come," he chided, "you're not going to back down, are you?"

He let his gun drop carelessly. Marsh noticed, and stared again at the gun in his left hand.

"It will be simple," explained the Griffon. "All you have to do is blow out your brains. I'll leave my card, and they can blame it on me. No bother, no family disgrace. Just a gallant gentleman defending government property. They might even hold a special military service for you. Rather nice, when you come to think of it. Flags, generals in uniform, taps over your grave—and I'll be haunted from one place to another."

"I won't do it, you swine!" the man

shrieked, jerking quickly. "I'll be damned if I will!"

Then, with a sudden move, he brought the automatic up from the table with his left hand and pointed it at the Griffon. A wild sneer streaked across his thin face as he sensed triumph. The Griffon had not raised his gun in time!

Marsh shoved the gun out toward the man in the scarlet mask and pulled the trigger. There was a crackling explosion and Marsh stiffened. The Griffon leaned carelessly against the radio panel and smiled. Marsh's hand dropped; his mouth opened and he stared at the man in the mask. A small hole appeared a few inches under the lip of his own breast pocket.

"I'm sorry you could not play the game," the Griffon explained to the dying man. "They all make that mistake. You see," he added, walking over and taking the weapon out of Marsh's trembling fingers, "this gun does not fire that way. It shoots backwards. I had it made. This upper section carries a short barrel. When you pulled the trigger, it released a firing pin at the front end of the mechanism cover. The bullet, in other words, comes out of the back. That's why I asked you to use your left hand. Through the heart, eh? Too bad."

And with that, the man in the mask pocketed the strange gun, glanced at the radio dial again and nodded. Then he fumbled under the bench. The body of Richard Marsh slumped to the floor.

As the man known as the Griffon left the hangar, a new sound caught his ear. Somewhere high above the field he could hear the throb-throb-throb of an aircraft motor. He listened attentively, remembering the man under the wing, then he raced across the floor and carried him outside again. He placed him well clear of the sheds and cut the bonds that held his wrists.

"Now be sensible and clear off."

With that advice, he raced back to the silver and black monoplane and climbed aboard as the other man released the Viet starter.

"All right?" asked the man.

"Perfect! Did a neat job of it, too. You know, it's interesting to watch that thing work. They use their left hands and point it at you, and all the time you're looking at the angle to see where it is going to hit them."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Right! The boys are upstairs, and things will begin to pop in a minute."

They eased the amphibian monoplane around and shot down the runway in a storm of slipstream

slashed out by the prop. The man on the ground sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared.

"What sort of a barge was that?" he asked. "Looks like a Seversky, but it's got a water-cooled engine. And the damn thing doesn't make a noise!"

Before he could finish unknotting his ankles, a low wail swept down from above and streaked for the shops behind the hangar. Then there was a crashing boom, and streaks of splintered fire swept up from the explosion.

"He's bombing the joint!" gasped the night watchman. He clambered to his feet and streaked for a telephone booth in his shed.

Above, the strange silver and black monoplane streaked up the sky lane and, once they were clear, the pilot opened the exhaust and cut out the mufflers.

"There he is," the man in the back seat jabbered, "over there! It's a government Helldiver."

"I thought it would be," answered the Griffon. "Let him have it."

The rear portion of the splinter-proof glass coupe-top slid back smartly. Then from out of a long narrow cupboard under the hump came two closely mounted Colt-Brownings, synchronized for converging fire at thirty yards. A special feed box was neatly streamlined into the movable mounting.

Ahead and slightly below they could see the Helldiver setting itself for another charge at the factory below. With a quick swish of the monoplane's tail, the Griffon nosed around and apparently turned to cut away.

The guns of the rear cockpit opened up and flamed across the circle the Griffon was drawing about the Helldiver. The guns were held firmly and the Navy ship staggered badly under the fire. Then, before it could get clear, the monoplane came around, completed its circle and nosed down slightly. A terrible fire swept out of two Hotchkiss 13.2 guns mounted under the cowling. The Helldiver whipped up like a steeplechaser that has been clipped with the whip, and stood out in bold relief. The Griffon pressed two more triggers, and two Chatelleraults, mounted in the wing roots next to the Skoda mufflers, flamed out in chorus with the Hotchkiss weapons. The Helldiver was literally shot to bits.

Wings came away as though carved off by some unseen blade. A tank exploded, pouring liquid fire across the sky, and the whole thing

dropped tail-first toward the row of saw-toothed buildings below. The man in the rear pit of the monoplane gave the tumbling wreck a final torrent of lead and then the ship swung away and raced toward the east.

"THAT settles that," laughed the Griffon.

"You'll put your foot in it one o' these days, me boy," the man in the back seat remarked as he shoved the Colt-Brownings away.

But the man who had worn the scarlet mask only laughed again. Then, settling down to his flying, he turned the ship toward the guiding beam of the Montauk Light. In twenty minutes, they were thrumming along, with the Skoda mufflers in again, and nosing gently down for a stretch of silver beach that lipped a stretch of beautiful lawn. The monoplane dropped fast, whining like a wounded ghost, and skimmed across the rollers. Then it ran up a concrete ramp that was sheltered by cedars.

The man in the rear pit slipped out and fumbled with nickel-plated levers hidden under flap-plates near the roots of the wings. He yanked them up and then pulled at the wing tips. The wings creaked at some hidden joint and began to fold back slowly so that they lay flat against the glistening sides of the monocoque fuselage. With the last hum of power, the ship rolled into an open recess that suddenly appeared from nowhere and slipped into the darkness. The two great steel doors, camouflaged with artificial rock-garden decorations, rolled back.

Once inside, they switched on lights, wheeled the monoplane around on a turntable so that its nose pointed toward the hidden doors again.

"Come on, O'Dare. The Dusenbergs. We've got to move fast. Old Maheffey will be looking us up."

The little Irishman gave the monoplane a quick look-over. Then they turned out the lights and opened a small door that led into a long, dark tunnel.

"Nice of those boys in the good old days to dig this for us, eh, O'Dare?" The Griffon grinned as he led the way.

"Well need it, too, one o' these days."

"You must stop worrying about trifles," the Griffon protested as they reached a flight of damp steps. "Old Marsh had it coming to him. I really did him a good turn."

"Yeah? You'd have a hell av a toime explainin' it to a judge."

"You're getting touchy, Barney. I should have let you finish that Helldiver. You need a little real fighting to tone you up."

They were climbing the steps now, and opening

the door that led into another cellarlike chamber. The Griffon turned on another light, reached inside a tall wall rack and came out with a small black bottle that was well decorated with age. He twisted the wire, thumbed the cork and there was a low pop. A glass was snatched from a locker near by, and the Griffon poured himself a drink.

"You joining me, Barney?" the Griffon asked, holding the '24 to the light.

"Naw. That stuff? Pfitt! I'll take a swig o' the auld craeter. Ye can't beat the auld pot-still nectar. Thanks. Here goes Arrrr-r-h! O'Doul's Dew fer fightin' men!"

They stood facing each other, and smiling. Then they replaced the bottles and carried on.

Up another flight of stairs they came into the broad corridor of a Long Island country home. Expensive furniture, pictures and art objects lined the walls. Thick pile rugs were under foot. Books on all scientific subjects filled the bookcases and two suits of armor, erected on each side of the door, seemed to frown on this backstairs intrusion.

The Griffon glided across the floor, removing his flying kit, and turned on the radio. He caught the last lines of the important announcement:

" . . . The Chief of Police of New York City wishes Mr. Kerry Keen, the noted ballistics expert, to report to Police Head-quarters as soon as possible."

The Griffon snapped the switch, leaped for a coat-rack and grabbed a long, black caped overcoat.

"Come on, Barney, we've got to step. That flatfoot will be looking everywhere for us before very long."

"An' don't forgit Mr. Drury Lang, the Sherlook of Center Street, who's been waitin' for months to catch you in somethin'," warned the Little Irishman.

SEVENTEEN thousand dollars' worth of automotive mechanism and coach-work luxury raced out of Grayfield, the Griffon's Long Island retreat, with Barney O'Dare behind the wheel. Through Southampton, Patchogue, Babylon and Nassau it roared, with the Griffon listening in on their auto-radio set as the smooth concrete ribbon came toward them and seemed to be swallowed up by the roaring Dusenbergs.

Across the Queens bridge they charged, while the Griffon drew down the blinds of the

back seat and changed into dapper evening clothes. His trousers flaunted Bond Street pleats; his linen was spotless and gleaming. An opera hat was jauntily perched on his head.

Up Fifth Avenue they purred, with Barney dexterously guiding the long black machine through the maze of traffic. The Griffon carefully changed certain wallets, money and his flat automatic to an inside pocket. Then, selecting an evening cane from the rack under the robe rail, he sat back, lit an expensive cigarette and watched Barney turn into East 54th Street. The Dusenbergs pulled up at a ramshackle tenement, plentifully garnished with garbage boxes, ash cans and dirty windows. Barney touched a horn button on the wheel, and a low wail pealed out from somewhere under the hood.

Like a shot, the Griffon was out of the car and had darted up the steps, disappearing through a creaky doorway which seemed to open automatically. Inside, he grinned at a tall, horse-faced man dressed in his undershirt and a pair of old carpet slippers.

"Splendid, Jarrett," grinned the Griffon. "Here, buy yourself a can of oil. The hinges still squeak."

A ten-spot changed hands, and the old man laughed. "If I grease 'em, Mr. Keen, ye'll be fergettin' to buy me ile!"

"You thieving old devil," replied the Griffon. "Your 'ile' all comes from the same place. O'Doul's Dew, isn't it? Barney's saturated in it."

"Aye, an' Barney'll niver die o' auld age."

But the Griffon was racing up the rickety stairs now, two at a time, up three flights and then a fourth, that ended in a square, boxlike turret. Deftly he shoved one end up and saw the stars above. He slipped through, dropped the lid back quietly and delicately flicked dust off his gloves. He glanced around; then, like a cat, he darted through a maze of rotting brick chimneys and came to the edge of the roof. A thin steel wire ran down from an obscure white building across the murky yards. It might have been a radio aerial.

The Griffon carefully unwound it from a hook screwed into a beam, wrapped it carefully about his left hand, placed his cane under his arm and climbed to the low retaining wall. With a last glance around, he took another grip higher up with his right hand and drew on the steel wire. Carefully he moved along the edge of the buttress and found a small chalk mark. He placed both feet on the mark, drew the wire tight again and leaped away.

The wire twanged as it tightened, and the black figure swung in a perfect arc across the dingy yards

below and continued on up toward the sharp corner of the white building across the way.

The top of the wire was bound tightly to another that appeared to be another aerial swung between the white apartment house and the tenement. It was perfect for the Griffon. At the end of his swing, he reached out, grabbed a steel leader pipe and hung against the corner of the building like a black bat. Then, carefully fitting his steel wire into the hole of a large insulator, he climbed up the corner of the building on the inset bricks that marked the edge.

In another minute he was clambering over the edge of a sandstone buttress and dropping lightly on the tar and gravel roof of the white building. Not ten yards away stood the trellised walls of a penthouse.

THE Griffon darted to a window, opened it carefully, threw a neat foot across the sill and slipped inside. The window was closed again and he switched on a light. He was in a man's bedroom, neatly furnished in modern equipment. Through an open door could be seen a large study, with a massive desk backed against a wide wall. Over the desk were mounted fully a hundred pistols of all types and sizes.

The Griffon carefully brushed his clothes, took a clean pair of gloves from his dresser drawer and pulled them on. A bell tinkled in the other room. He sauntered through, lighting a new cigarette, and opened the door into a hall, where an elevator was just closing its doors. He darted to the pistol grouping, then went and opened the door.

"Ah, there, Maheffey," he said. "And you, too, Lane. What's up?"

"Can we come in, Mr. Keen?" asked the heavy-shouldered man addressed as Maheffey. "You hear that radio announcement?"

"Radio? No. What's up? I hardly ever turn it on."

"The Griffon again," snarled Lang, the Department of Justice man, scowling at Kerry Keen. "Where are you going?"

"Just called my car. Was dashing off to a hot spot. Too much work. Fed up. The Griffon again, eh? What's he been up to this time?"

"It's serious," Maheffey said. "A Mr. Richard Marsh—" he quoted from his notebook—"an airplane engineer, or designer of some sort, out at the Gervais plant at Farmingdale. Mr. Scott of the Department of

Justice sent us for you."

"Scott, Department of Justice? What the devil?" asked Keen.

"Government proposition," went on Maheffey. "You see, the Gervais plant has a big order from the Army or Navy for two hundred new fighting ships. Marsh is the big shot on the job. He designed 'em. Pretty good machines from what I can make out"

"Gervais fighters?" mused Keen. "Finest in the world—so they say."

"Well, somebody bumped Marsh off in his office to-night. Yeah, the Griffon—left his card again. Then he apparently bombed the place. A Navy plane was in the air and tried to drive him off, but the Griffon shot it down in flames."

"Navy ship in the air at that time of night? Doing what? Who was flying it?"

"We don't know. Can't trace it at all. No numbers left on the plane, and the motor numbers seem to have been filed off. The two guys were burned so badly that we'll never identify them."

"Sounds queer," mused Keen. "Any clues?"

"This, that's why we came up to see you. Ever see one of these before?"

Drury Lang thrust out a square palm on which rolled a chunk of lead.

Keen took it between his gloved fingers and studied it a minute. He turned it over again and then weighed it, moving his hand up and down slowly.

"A Mauser automatic slug. Where did you find this?"

"Embedded in the fibre board wall of Marsh's office. It went right through him," Lang growled. "Nice weapon, eh?"

"Um!" mused Keen. "Our friend, the Griffon, takes no chances, does he? Anything else?"

"Plenty. Here's the shell It is unusual, isn't it, Mr. Keen?" Drury Lang added. "Isn't that an unusual Mauser shell?"

KEEN took the copper casing, walked over to his desk and picked up a microscope. He put the shell in a slot and studied it carefully.

"It is a strange shell, Lang," he admitted. "The mark on the cap is so unusual."

"Yes, Mr. Keen," went on Lang in an oily tone. "It is unusual, considering that you are the only man I know of who had such a gun. By the way, Mr. Keen, where is your Mauser automatic? It's not here any more."

Drury Lang was staring up, at the wall of pistols. Off to one side was a dark patch, left by the shielding of light from the velvet background, where

a large automatic had been hung. The two hooks were there, but the gun was gone!

It was an embarrassing moment for Kerry Keen, but he merely smiled, lit another cigarette and reached for a decanter.

"Have a drink, gentlemen," he said. "Some one is playing a game on us."

"Some one is playing a hell of a game on us," replied Lang, watching Keen closely. "No, I don't take it on duty. Got to be on your toes in a case like this."

"Good idea, Lang. You never know," Keen said enigmatically. "Now about that automatic. I wonder where that went. I shall have to ask O'Dare about it. He's getting very careless of late."

"You'd better not be careless, Keen.

You might find it, and then where would you be?" Lang taunted sneeringly.

Maheffey stared at Lang for several seconds, "What the devil are you driving at, Lang? You don't suspect Mr. Keen, do you? He probably hasn't been out of the house for hours."

"Maybe he has and maybe he hasn't," growled Lang. "How do we know? It was a Mauser 9-mm gun that killed Marsh, and as far as I know, Keen is the only man in these parts that has such a gun. No crook would be going around carrying a cannon like a 9-mm. Mauser. Besides, I don't like this messing around with Alex Blandon."

"Alex Blandon, of the Blandon Aircraft Corporation in Maryland? Why, they're the Gervais plant's greatest rivals," stammered Maheffey.

"That's right," agreed Keen quietly. "Blandon called on me some time ago with reference to some ballistics matter, concerning the new guns they are going to use on their new ships."

"And Alex Blandon lost out on that government contract for two hundred ships, didn't he?" snarled Lang. "There's the guy who would like to see Marsh out of the way."

"That sounds quite reasonable," nodded Keen. "Nice thinking, Lang. Why don't you go down and nab Blandon?"

"Bah! Blandon's too smart," Lang replied. "We checked on him right away, but he was in Baltimore all night. He wouldn't be fooling around, taking those risks. He'd rather let some one like the Griffon do it. That's the guy we want, Mr. Keen." Drury Lang gave Keen a

searching glance.

"Well, there's no use arguing here," Maheffey said. "How about running out to Farmingdale, Keen? I'd like you to have a look at that stuff they were using. It has us guessing."

"My car is downstairs. This should be interesting."

"You'd better make it interesting, Keen," Lang warned him.

BARNEY O'DARE was downstairs with the Dusenberg when they came out of the elevator. Keen twirled his stick, wrapped his white silk scarf about his throat and nodded to Maheffey and Lang to get in. Then he gave the orders to the bland-faced O'Dare.

"Gervais plant, Farmingdale, Long Island. Ask a policeman when you get to the four corners where trolley tracks turn off to the right."

"You seem to know all about it, Keen," growled Lang.

"Oh, I've been out that way, toward Southampton."

"You have a place this side of Montauk Point too, don't you?"

"Grayfields? Oh, yes. Bit of a country place for weekends," Keen told him. "Have a small laboratory out there to work out ideas. Guns, you know. Dabble with a few explosives. Have to in my line."

The car was streaking for the Queens bridge again.

"I'd like to know how the hell you do it, Keen," Lang pursued. "You don't make such a lot writing magazine articles about pistols, rifles and ammunition. Your income tax statements don't justify it, either."

"Oh, that place out there was left me by my mother a few years ago," Keen said. "Then I do an odd spot of work for the Ordnance Department now and again, and you don't have to list that, you know. And I have a lecture every week or so. All grist to my mill, gentlemen."

"Bah! One of these days, Keen, you'll trip yourself up. Then we might find out who the Griffon is," Lang retorted.

Keen laughed and offered Maheffey a cigar. "Isn't he a case?" he asked.

"He gets some queer ideas," agreed Maheffey.

For the rest of the distance, Keen entertained his guests with accounts of new arms that were being tested in various countries. Even Lang had to admit that Keen knew his stuff, and he listened eagerly until Barney drew them up before the

Gervais hangar.

As they got out and crossed to the brilliantly lit hangar, Barney drove the car away and parked it near the undamaged shops. They went inside, and John Scott, the Department of Justice man, came forward to greet Keen.

"Glad you could get here, Kerry. It's a hell of a mess. Can you trace that Mauser bullet for us?"

"Sure he can," broke in Lang, "but he wont. He's too smart."

Scott stared at Lang, then turned back to Keen with a questioning glance.

"Mr. Lang," explained Kerry, "has the idea that I might be the Griffon. What do you think of that for the day's best story?"

"Lang needs his noggin knocked," Scott snorted. "But come in here. I want you to have a look at this stuff."

Scott led the way into the hangar, which had suffered from the two bombs that had been dropped successfully. Keen inspected the wreckage with cool interest, and Lang watched him carefully.

"Take a look at this stuff," Scott said. "Ever see anything like it before?"

Kerry stepped over to some dural framework and stared at the queer spots that marked the shiny metal. They were whitish with black edges. He fingered them, smelled the stuff and frowned.

"Now bend that metal a little," Scott went on. "See what happens."

Kerry pressed the heavy rib of a rudder between his fingers. The metal cracked and snapped in two like a piece of dry macaroni. He frowned again and turned slowly to Scott.

"Damnable stuff, eh?" he said. "And all this material is completely destroyed?"

"No question of it," Scott agreed. "Worse than ordinary explosives. It fuses everything in dural or duralumin it touches. What is it?"

"I don't know," Keen replied, fingering it again.

"You almost sound as though you were telling the truth," Lang broke in.

"I am telling the truth," Keen said. "Don't worry about this stuff. You worry about that automatic. That's your best bet."

KEEN glanced about the hangar and spotted a small glass jar with a screw top. Picking it up, he began scraping mounds of the strange powder into the jar. When he had it half-full, he

screwed the top on and dropped it into his coat pocket

"I'll have a look at it later on," he explained. "Right now, I haven't an idea what it might be."

But Kerry Keen was lying, this time. He did have an idea.

"Come on over and have a look at Marsh. His body is still in the hangar office. You know what this means, Keen," Scott went oh, leading the way. "Gervais will have a hell of a time completing their contract. All this stuff is lost. Marsh, their chief designer, is dead, and what's more, we have just learned from Lawton that all the plans and blueprints on this job are missing—taken from the safe."

"Good Lord!" Keen gasped. "Who is Lawton?"

"He's the business manager. He's inside, too."

"That means, then, that Gervais is about licked, as far as completing that order on contract"

"Yes, and the Brandon crowd will be able to step in and grab a new contract. How does that sound, Mr. Keen?" Lang snapped.

Keen took no notice of the detective. He was thinking hard.

"These ships are all replacements for the Pacific Fleet, too, Keen," Scott went on quietly. "We can't afford to fool around with obsolete models much longer."

Suddenly Keen whirled and stared toward the doors. Outside he could hear the drone of a powerful motor. He glanced hurriedly at Scott

"Better take cover. This might be anything!"

"How do you know?" Lang gaged. But he followed them outside and scurried for the open field.

The ship came out of nowhere with a roar. It was a trim, tooth-winged biplane with a water-cooled motor of some sort. It nosed down and lunged at the Gervais hangar. Kerry whistled and dropped to the turf. The rest followed his move. Then came a low wail and a scream of a motor as the biplane streaked up from its dive.

Bong! Bong! Two bombs sank their black noses into the roof of the Gervais hangar. Flame streaked up, and a garish light flamed out, illuminating the black night

"Well, I'll be damned!" gulped Lang. "Did you see that?"

"What?" whispered Scott.

"That ship had a design painted under the wing—the same design as the Griffon uses on his card!"

"I'm glad you saw that, Lang," Kerry Keen added, getting up and brushing dried grass from his

evening clothes. "And do you know, gentlemen, if it weren't for that toothed wing, I'd swear that ship was a Blandon biplane fighter. Too much taper, though."

"Let's see what he did this time," growled Scott

"Watch out. He might come back again. Yes, here he comes. Duck!" Keen warned them.

Like a vulture, the toothed-wing biplane came screeching back, over the hangar. Two guns flamed from its nose set low down in the cowling. Their explosions were ear-splitting, and the slugs pounded into the battered metal roof with a smack that sounded like the blows of a massive sledge.

"Hagar!" Keen exclaimed mysteriously.

"What did you say?" Lang asked.

"Nothing. Just a phrase I use when I need luck. Duck!"

The ship came over the hangar and sprayed the field all around them. The slugs threw up small triangular sections of turf. Some one let out a scream, and a body fell forward with a thud. The wild ship screeched over them as they flattened out again.

"Who was that?" roared Lang.

"Maheffey. Let's go over there. He must have stopped one."

Keen crossed over and dropped beside the heavy man, who was rolling about on his back.

"Not—not bad!" Maheffey whispered. "Clean through me, though. This shoulder."

They carried Maheffey into a shop and laid him out with several others who had been injured in the two explosions from the sky. Two policemen were dead, two more badly burned with the strange explosive, and again the shop was spattered with the whitish spots which seemed to hiss slightly.

Keen took more samples in another jar. Then, when no one was looking, he went out into the hangar, carefully picked up several shapeless slugs and dropped them into his pocket. He slipped silently through the door and ran down the tarmac toward the road at the end where his car had been taken. As he reached the Dusenbergs, he ripped the door open and started to shout, "Quick! Out to—"

"Out to where?" a voice snapped from somewhere in the back seat

It was Drury Lang!

"Out to—to New York. Back home," replied Kerry Keen.

"OUT to New York, eh?" Lang laughed. "I'd give ten bucks to know where you were going."

"You spoke too soon," laughed Keen. "Make it fifteen, and I'll tell you."

"It's worth it," Lang snapped, pulling out his wallet. "Here, three fives. Where were you going?"

Keen pocketed the three bills carefully and turned to the bland-faced O'Dare. "Grayfields, O'Dare. I've changed my mind."

"Grayfields? Your Long Island joint, eh? Well, let's go. I've always wanted to see that dump. What's the idea?"

"I want to find out what that white stuff was. I can test it out there. It intrigues me, Mr. Lang."

"You intrigue me, too Mr. Keen. If I hadn't seen that ship to-night—that ship with the Griffon marking on it—I'd have slapped you in the cooler."

"On what grounds?" Keen was staring at Lang now, trying to fathom the real meaning behind his words.

"For the murder of Richard Marsh," snapped Lang. "And don't try to fool me. I found your—the same automatic you finished him with. Here it is, on the seat of your own car!"

He held a black Mauser up and turned on the light in the roof so that the gleam poured down on it.

Keen blinked and reached for the gun.

"Oh, no," Lang said. "I'm keeping this for future reference. You can do the explaining later."

The Dusenbergs were rolling out of the Gervais grounds.

"Stop!" Keen yelled to Barney. Then as the car pulled up to the curb, he turned back to Lang.

"Look here, Lang," he began, "you're getting in my hair. I'm going to make a dicker with you. Take it or leave it. You keep the gun. At midnight—no, an hour later, that's one a.m. Friday morning—you come to my place on 55th Street. I'll do two things. I'll prove to you that my gun did not kill Marsh, and what's more, I'll give you all the evidence you want concerning who did. You can use it as you see fit, and you needn't mention where you got it. You get the credit for cleaning up the mess. I—well, I'm let alone. What do you say?"

"So you are the Griffon?" leered Lang.

"That's for you to prove, if you can. What do you say? It's a chance of a lifetime. It won't do you any harm with the department, you know. There's only one catch. You lay off me until one a.m. Friday morning. After that, you can go the limit. Is it a deal?"

Lang sat staring at Keen for more than a minute. "That sucker in that plane with the Griffon markings on— if it weren't for him, I'd run you in now. But it's a deal. Shake!"

They shook.

"Now get out of my car and don't bother me on any pretext until Friday, one a.m. All right, O'Dare. Grayfields!"

Lang stuffed the gun into his coat pocket, opened the door and slipped out. The Dusenbergs raced away into the night.

"**W**HAT a sap!" stormed Barney out of the corner of his mouth. "What the devil did ye leave thot gun on the seat for?"

"Just to puzzle Mr. Lang, Barney. He was getting too nosey. That gun was a nice red herring."

"How ye going to get out o' that one?"

"You ask the silliest questions, O'Dare. Let me alone. I want to think. And step on it. We've got a lot to do in less than twenty-four hours."

Barney stepped on it and held his tongue. An hour later, they crunched up the drive of Grayfields, and Keen climbed out, holding the two glass jars and the slugs. While Barney put the car away, Keen changed into a tweed lounging suit. At the door of his laboratory, he stopped and called to the Mick who was sneaking upstairs.

"No, Barney. Down the tunnel for you. That ship has to be ready to go the minute it's dark. Bed after that, my son. You need it."

"Barney growled under his breath, but went down the cellar stairs and headed for the secret hangar.

In the laboratory, Keen took down several books and studied them for some time. Then he started to work in earnest and began making tests on the samples of powder he had brought from Farmingdale. The early morning light was seeping through the windows before he was through. Then, with his findings jotted down on a piece of paper, he went over to a typewriter and drew on thin rubber gloves. He selected a sheet of white paper, placed it in the roller and wrote:

1—*Marsh died by his own hand. Fired a gun with his thumb, holding in his left hand. The recoil hurled the gun across the room, and it may still be found in a small tool box under the radio bench.*

2—*The bombs were filled with a mixture of*

thermite, barium-peroxide, which, upon contact with anything offering an aluminum content, tends to heat it to such a degree that it fuses the metal contacted. This is why the dural metal broke so easily where this mixture spattered.

3—*Marsh was in radio contact with a Henry Mortholm, an inspector of the Department of Commerce. His set was tuned to the special D. of C. wave length allotted to this man's department. Mortholm and an assistant named George Grace flew the Helldiver provided by Alexander Blandon, and died in the crash. The Griffon finished them somehow.*

"That's a starter for Mr. Lang," smiled Keen. "All we need now is the rest. Ah, yes, and a spot of sleep."

He folded the sheet carefully and stuffed it in a long envelope. Then he carefully took out about a dozen of the type bars and replaced them carefully with others from a box in a near-by drawer. Then he ran over the keys again and smiled.

"Let Lang try to trace this sheet by this typewriter. He'll have a warm time."

He tossed the type-bars he had removed into a small electric furnace, and in a few minutes they were transformed into a dirty molten mass. Ten minutes later, he was sound asleep.

BARNEY woke him shortly after noon with a great silver tray of food.

"Lovely!" Keen chortled; "One of the seven wonders of the world, Barney."

"What's that?"

"You can tune an Avia, drive a Dusenbergs, dress a gentleman and boil an egg. A startling list of accomplishments, only exceeded by your capacity for O'Doul's Dew. Quite a man!"

"Ye fergot me ability with the backseat typewriters."

"Ah, yes, a most necessary qualification, considering what we have before us to-night. A long flight and a gay one. I hope you filled the special tanks. We want range as well as speed this evening, Barney."

"Aye, an' it's about time ye did some fillin' o' thot bank account. We're get-tin' pretty low. Ye've been spendin' money like water o' late, an' ye can't expect to go on like this much longer."

"Leave it to me, Barney," smiled Keen. "To-night we do the deed. Tomorrow, we share the plunder. That is, we'll make a little deposit—on account."

“On account o’ wot?”

“On account of we’re going to shut Mr. Drury Lang up – for the time being, at least. And now, my togs. I’m going for a walk. Need plenty of fresh air. We leave dramatically on the dot of seven, if it’s dark enough. That will give us eight hours.”

“We might do it,” moaned Barney. “Whatever it is you’re up to.”

“We must.”

Keen returned from a long walk over the sands, deep in thought. His plans were complete now, and he returned to his laboratory and worked on another experiment to make up his time. Barney was still below, doing things to the folding wing monoplane, preparing it for the big event slated for that evening.

By six o’clock, Keen was hard at work on a small map he had made of an aviation factory situated along the river between Baltimore and Ellicott City. He worked over it with a small scale and figured intently. Kerry Keen took no chances when he went on a job. By the time Barney had come upstairs and prepared a meal, Keen had figured every step of his moves from the time he slipped out of the ship until he climbed back again.

They ate together in silence and then climbed into flying kit. They buckled on their Dorsal chute straps and left the main swivels dangling where they could be instantly hitched into the packs which made up the cushions of their cockpit seats. Over this they buckled on light Kapok safety jackets.

“Righto!” beamed Keen. “The Griffon and his—let’s see, what would you call the young of a griffon, Barney?”

“Griffe, I should think,” offered the little Irishman.

“Griffe? Ah, yes, that will do. Griffe is the sediment that forms on the top of new wine a few days after it is bottled. You’re the top, Barney. Splendid! The Griffon and his top head for Baltimore—and God help them!”

“Let’s have a drink before we go. You never know. And then, on to Baltimore!”

The Avia, still warm from its test run in the sunken hangar, opened at once and settled to a gentle purr. It was dark outside now, and only a few stars shone across the velvety water. A few craft, twinkling their red and green lights, danced at anchor, and Montauk threw her broad beam across the easy rollers that came in from the

Rhode Island shore.

Keen turned the plane well out to sea before he cut out the Skodas. At 4,000 feet, he turned southwest and watched the tip of New York slam past him as his needle showed 245 m.p.h. The big Avia poured out her revs with a vengeance, and they settled back for a 275-mile flight.

Barney sat with his back close to Keen’s and listened attentively to the plans as Kerry outlined them.

“And what’s more,” warned Keen, “we are doing no more scrapping than is necessary on the way down. We’ll fight there, if we have to, but on the way down, don’t go looking for trouble.”

They were opposite Atlantic City now, and Kerry started to ease around to cross the lower portion of New Jersey and head for Dover and Baltimore when suddenly, out of nowhere, came the thud of bullets that pounded about the monoplane with all the fury of a Vulcan storm. Kerry slammed the ship over, zoomed hard and did a snappy climbing turn. A great swish went past them, and out of the glassed-in cowl they could see a Navy Helldiver. From the rear pit, two guns flamed out at them, and Kerry had to dance his ship madly to keep clear.

“What the devil!” he gagged.

“Phwat are ye waitin* for?” snarled Barney.

“No chance. Halgar,” snorted Keen.

“Phwat the hell is this Halgar business? Something off a push-cart, that thim Turks eat?”

“You’ll see if you stick around long enough.”

The Helldiver came after them, and Kerry was forced to fly in short, jerky moves to keep clear of the leaden storm. Barney’s fingers itched to reach for the Colt-Brownings, but he held back.

The Helldiver was in splendid hands, and no matter what Kerry did, the thunderous, crackling fire beat at them.

Barney was swearing under his breath, and reached for the guns again.

“Lay off!” snapped Keen.

The Helldiver was cutting inside the monoplane again, and the rear guns flamed at them, but not with the fire and venom of the forward guns. Keen frowned and darted back and forth, watching Barney with one eye and the Navy fighter with the other. Keen had no way of knowing, this time, whether the Helldiver was an actual service ship or not, but he intended to find out.

Suddenly behind them there was a loud explosion and a small sunburst of flame. It seemed to come from somewhere under the cowling. The

Helldiver jerked like a wolfhound on a leash. Then it shot up, clawed at the night sky with its wheels and fell back on its tail.

“What did you do, O’Dare?” screeched Keen.

“Nawthin’. Just looked at him.”

“There’s power in your smile, *Mademoiselle!*” Keen said. “Something hit them. They’re going down out of control.”

He set the monoplane in a tight spiral and went down after the tumbling Helldiver. They saw it hit the water with a smash that threw up two curling spumes, of milky water. Then a mushrooming plume of white smoke spread over the wreckage and blotted it out for an instant.

Keen continued down. He was interested in that mess. The monoplane was set down on easy rollers, and Keen eased it gently toward the tangle of dural and tubing. He turned over the controls to Barney, who slipped up into the front seat and clambered out on the wing. He lay flat and signaled Barney to ease the wing tip over the wreckage. Then he lay over and directed a strong electric torch down into an opening above the front cockpit. After a few seconds, he came back.

“What happened?” Barney asked, as Keen took the front seat again.

“Halgar,” was all that Keen would answer, but there was a queer smile on his face as he added, “There’s one they can’t pin on us. You only looked at it, Barney, and there’s no penalty for looking.”

THE clock on the instrument board said 9:30 when they took off again and headed inland. Keen did some fast calculation and gave the throttle another notch. The amphibian monoplane took up the quirking with glee, and they raced across Dover and headed toward Baltimore, climbing madly. Barney sat in the rear pit, still wondering what all the “Halgar” business was.

They climbed again to 4,000 feet, and Keen sat back and checked his position. Then he suddenly spotted what he was after—a broad flying field that ran down to a small, curling river and backed up to a row of brick buildings and hangars. They shifted the mufflers in and set themselves for another long, easy glide. The trim monoplane eased down, her steel prop just ticking over. Nothing but the low whine of the slipstream indicated their approach.

Keen adjusted his scarlet mask, shoving his goggles clear, and fumbled for his flat automatic.

They came in over some small bungalows and dropped gently, with scarcely a rumble, and let the ship roll into the shadow of a low hedge that ran down to the water. Barney adjusted the Viet starter for quick action and took Keen’s place as he hopped out and started for the hangars.

Keen moved like a cat for the first building, and peered in a window. Not satisfied, he crept along in the shadows and tried another window. This time he was rewarded. Two men in ruffled business suits sat before a radio panel, frowning at the dials. The older had ear-phones on and held a short stubby pencil in his hand. The other, about thirty, had a face that was drawn and ashen. The dial on the set was tuned to 89. Keen smiled.

He slipped along the wall, found an open window and climbed in. A strange biplane stood facing the hangar door. It was a Blandon fighter, and Keen noticed that the wings had been painted so skillfully with black paint that it appeared upon first sight to be fitted with tapered or dog-toothed airfoils.

“Just as I thought,” he muttered as he darted for the radio-room door and jerked it open.

Blandon and the younger man sat stiffened with surprise.

“You can switch that off, Blandon,” Keen said crisply. “Your second Hell-diver went the same way as the first. I saw to that.”

He threw a small white card across the bench, and Blandon glared down at it before speaking.

“The Griffon!” he gasped.

The smaller man suddenly jerked and swung his arms toward Keen, but Kerry shot out a stiff left that caught him full in the face, and he went back as though hurled by a giant catapult. There was a crash, and the other man hit the edge of a steel bench and collapsed with a low groan.

Keen’s automatic menaced Blandon, who slipped off the ear-phones and clicked the switch.

“Well, you win. What do you want?”

“First, I want the roll of plans and blueprints that Richard Marsh turned over to you.”

“Yeah? And then what?”

“Next you’re going to complete this for me, on your own typewriter. Move over there.”

Blandon took the sheet from Keen’s gloved hand and stared at what had already been written. His eyes flamed as he realized that the Griffon had him cold.

“Where do I come in?” Blandon asked.

“Fill that out and sign it, and you go out—out of the country in your own camouflaged fighter, the one with the Griffon insignia that you used at

Farmingdale last night. You're lucky at that, you know, Blandon."

"Are you playing the game square?" Blandon asked anxiously.

"Squarer than you ever knew, Blandon. Get busy."

The clock on the wall said 10:45.

"**B**LANDON stared at the man on the floor. A trickle of blood coursed out of his nostrils. Blandon leaned down and felt the pulse. He turned and stared at Keen, who was grinning at him through the scarlet mask.

"He's dead!" gulped Blandon, going even whiter.

"He had a bum heart, Blandon. Too much flying in his better days. Come on, let's have it!"

Blandon gave the man at his feet another glance, then stuck the sheet into the typewriter and wrote, with several promptings by the Griffon:

4—*Flying one of my own ships that carried a Griffon insignia, I made another attack on the Gervais plant on Wednesday night. The ship was disguised by painting the edges of the wings black to give them a tapered appearance.*

5—*A second Helldiver, flown by Maurice Blandon, my brother, and carrying Austin Stark, set out on Thursday night to bomb the plant again. They never reached Farmingdale. These Helldivers were at the Blandon plant to be fitted with experimental gun mountings.*

6—*Marsh was paid \$100,000 to turn over the Gervais plans and resign from that firm. He also agreed to store as many Gervais fighter ships in the main hangar as that space would hold, thus giving us the chance to destroy as many as possible. Mortholm, of the D. of C. was —to assist us in getting special government rating on the Blandon ships and was in on the deal.*

7—*This is all. Realizing that it brands me as far as aviation is concerned, I am leaving the country.*

(Signed) ALEXANDER BLANDON.

"Very nice," smiled Keen. "Now dab your fingers on that ink-pad and do the job right. That's right—your fingerprints. I'm taking no chances, Blandon."

The treacherous aviation manufacturer did as he was told, but his fingers trembled as he

daubed them down on the white sheet beneath his signature. Keen slipped it back inside the manila envelope and stuffed it inside his coat.

"Now the plans and blueprints."

Blandon turned and opened a large safe. He took out a large packet and shoved it across to Keen. The man in the scarlet mask opened the heavy flap, fingered through the papers and seemed satisfied.

"And now, Mr. Blandon, your steed is without."

Blandon took a helmet and a short leather coat down from the wall, put them on, and walked to the door.

Keen covered him while he drew back the big doors. Then, as Blandon climbed in the fighter, Keen stood on the opposite wing-root and peered in at the dials.

"Full tanks, plenty of oil, everything," he said. "You ought to make the border all right."

"Don't worry, I will. But some day I'll come back and haunt you to the ends of the earth, Griffon. I don't know who you are or how you gummed all this up, but if I live to be a million, I'll get back at you."

Keen smiled through the mask, and watched Blandon set the controls for starting the motor. Then he put his free hand inside and slapped the black breeches of the heavy guns mounted just under the instrument board on each side.

"Halgar?" he asked.

"Halgar," nodded Blandon.

As the motor opened up with a roar, Keen dropped off the wing, and the fighter raced out into the darkness.

"Halgar, you fool! Halgar!" boomed the man in the mask.

THE clock inside the radio room said 11:15 when Keen raced out into the darkness and headed down the shadows for the amphibian. As he approached on the run, the big Avia opened up with a roar. Overhead, the Blandon climbed for height before setting out on its runaway flight for the border.

Shouts went up from somewhere. A gun barked and a slug screeched over Keen's head. He leaped into the cockpit and roared down the field, his eyes, averted to watch the Blandon. Then the thing he hoped for happened. The Blandon pilot had seen the flame from the Avia exhausts. Keen had intended that he should, and had cut out the mufflers accordingly.

The Blandon fighter screamed down at them from above, both guns flaming.

“Lay off!” screamed Keen. “Let him have his head!”

“An’ us sit here and take it?” roared Barney.

“Sure. Smile at him, like you did at the Helldiver.”

Keen threw the monoplane all over the sky but made no attempt to use his speed for a getaway. In and out he darted, drawing Blandon’s fire. The fast biplane behind him, in the hands of a man who had had plenty of World War experience and his share of post-war service testing, was no truck on the stick. On the other hand, Kerry Keen was charged with the thrill of the chase now. He flew as he had never flown before and Blandon drew off, realizing that he had no chance against this man. Keen set himself dead in front of Blandon’s guns and drew his fire again.

The guns crackled and spat. The slugs whined about them and made Barney’s flesh creep. He reached for the guns again, but Keen caught him and jabbed him with his elbow.

“Let him alone. He’ll come a cropper—on Halgar.”

“Holy blitherin’ mother o’ mackerel!” bawled Barney. “What is this Halgar thing, anyway?”

“You’ll see. It’s what naughty boys get caught with. Whoops!”

The Blandon came in again, screeching and bellowing. The guns flamed and the slugs bit into their wing. The whole ship staggered, and Keen pulled her out just in time. Then, as he swerved sharply to draw Blandon’s fire, the guns flamed again, and there came a strange, muffled explosion and fanfare of flame. Barney saw it all in bold relief this time. The Blandon whipped over with a jerk and finished up on its back. Keen swerved around and watched the ship go down. It fell out of the upside-down position and went into a spin.

It stayed that way until it hit the ground—with a crash that could be heard at 2,000 feet.

“Halgar,” Keen remarked, taking off his scarlet mask.

“Halgar, hell! You got an hour and a half to get back and see Lang,” reminded Barney. “How are you going to do it?”

“Easy. Let’s go. New York City.”

“New York City?” bawled Barney. “You got a date with Lang at one o’clock!”

“That’s why I said—New York City. No time to go to Grayfields now. We’re heading for

the canyons of the mighty metropolis.”

Keen put the throttle to the Avia, nosed down and ran his needle well past the 250 mark. They settled back for the race for the city with ninety minutes to do nearly 300 miles, but the amphibian monoplane tore in to its task.

Once they were inside the New Jersey boundary, Keen began to check his chute and harness. He explained to Barney what his plans were and together they went over it as they slammed into view of the lights of New York. Then, as they roared over Perth Amboy, Barney slipped into Keen’s seat, and the slim ballistics expert prepared to depart.

As they crossed the Hudson, Keen drew back the rear flap of the cowl, crawled out and dropped on the wing root, holding clear. Barney watched him out of the corner of his eye and drew in the lever that cut in the mufflers. The slim monoplane dipped down over the mid-town section, and Barney carefully circled north of the Chrysler spire.

At a nod from Keen, Barney nosed down again and headed for the junction of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue, and Kerry threw himself clear. Barney jerked up and watched the black silk Dorsal chute open up and then seemingly disappear. He turned the nose of the monoplane back northwest and sought the beam from Montauk Light.

Keen felt his harness jerk and waited until it steadied. Then, selecting his spot carefully, he worked his risers and slipped wind until he was dropping dead for the broad roof of the apartment that was crowned with his own penthouse.

He saw the roof below sliding away, but he manipulated the silken strands again and it slid back. Then, before he could make another correction he hit, just missing the edge of his penthouse roof by inches.

“Lucky,” he grinned, sliding out of the chute harness, rolling up the big black parachute and stuffing it in a small window. “Hope I haven’t kept Lang waiting.”

HE slid over the sill of his bedroom window and closed it again quietly. In ten minutes, he had slipped out of his flying kit and was in a dinner coat—to all appearances just about to slip out to a supper-club.

He moved into his study, snapped on a light and sat down under a reading lamp. Hardly had he opened a magazine when the bell rang. He walked to the wall, took down the house phone and spoke.

“Lang? Right. Come on up.”

In a few minutes, Lang came in, stared about

the room for a few seconds and then snapped, "Where were you an hour ago?"

"Did you call?" replied Keen.

"Phoned you."

"Ah! I always cut my phone off when I'm working," Keen replied, throwing his hand toward his desk carelessly. "Can't be bothered answering phones when I'm on the job, you know."

Lang snorted. "Well, what about it, Mr. Keen?"

"Do you have my gun?"

"Right here—and the slug that killed Marsh, too. Now go to work."

Keen took the gun that Lang had picked up in his car and inserted a bullet. Then he took out a bullet-stop, a metal tube filled with sand that ran U-shaped. He stood off, fired the pistol at the lower opening and stood back. The gun flamed and the bullet-stop jerked. Then something fell at Keen's feet. He picked it up. The bullet that had been fired into the lower opening of the metal tube had come out of the upper end, its energy completely spent. Keen picked it up and handed it to Lang.

"There you are. Compare the slugs first. You will see that the bullet that killed Marsh is ridged with four tracks of rifling, while this of mine has five. Is that satisfactory?"

Lang studied the two slugs and threw the one that had just been fired back at the ballistics expert.

"And not only that, Lang," Keen smiled. "If you will compare the firing-pin impressions on the two shells, you will notice that the pin which discharged the shell that killed Marsh left a distinct three-cornered impression. This, just fired, is perfectly round. Are you satisfied now?"

Lang growled and nodded. Keen went across and hung the questioned automatic up on its place over the desk.

"Well, what about Marsh? You said you could tell me who killed Marsh."

"Sure I can. He killed himself," Keen snapped back, and then smiled at Lang's discomfiture. He took up a long, narrow-envelope and handed it to Lang. Lang snatched at it, ripped out the folded sheet of paper and read it quickly, while Keen directed a splash of seltzer into two glasses.

Lang's eyes squinted and his eyebrows arched high on his forehead as he read the details. Then suddenly he dashed to Keen's typewriter,

slipped a sheet of paper in and pounded away on each key in turn. He pulled the sheet out and compared the type. They were nowhere near alike. The type on Keen's machine was elite, while that on the printed evidence was pica. He frowned and rubbed his chin while he compared them again. Then he smiled at Keen and said, "So you are the Griffon, Mr. Keen, eh?"

"Does that say so?" smiled Keen.

"Well, no. Not just that way. You see—"

"Look here, Lang. Blandon wrote that in Baltimore last night. His fingerprints are on it, plainly marked."

"Then Blandon was the Griffon, after all?" Lang asked. "He might *have* been."

"What do you mean—might have been?"

"Well, you see, Blandon's dead. He died in a crash outside Baltimore about 11:30 last night."

"How the devil do you know, if you were here all night?" Lang stormed.

"It was announced on the radio," Keen explained, hoping that it had been.

"Killed in a crash, eh? Right after he signs this confession, too. How do you figure that one, Mr. Keen?"

"Just a coincidence," Keen parried. "OK, forget it, Lang. You have the information. Here are the plans. All you have to do is stall around for a day or so and figure out how to explain it. You'd better start by going back to Farmingdale about noon. You'll find the gun under the radio panel. From then on, you can work it out your own way. It should be easy."

"Okay," grinned Lang. "Now who killed Blandon? Never mind the crash stuff, Keen."

"Halgar."

"Halgar? That word again? What does it mean?"

"Well, I'll give you another tip, Lang. Blandon was trying to get that government contract on ships equipped with guns that fired Halgar."

"Say, will you quit using that word, Keen?"

"Halgar," explained Keen, "is a new German bullet that has tremendous muzzle velocity so that an ordinary .30 bullet has the punch to pierce heavy armor plate. It so happens that Blandon had written to me, knowing my knowledge of ballistics, and I had advised him to lay off the stuff, because of its high pressure in the breech. Our rifle barrels or machine-gun barrels are not ready for this stuff yet, and he persisted in using it. The result was that when modern guns are fired for any length of time, using Halgar, they tend to blow up. That's what happened

to Blandon, I believe.”

“Well, who was he shooting at?”

“He might have been shooting at the Griffon,” Keen answered.

“But—but—you were here in New York!” flamed Lang.

“So! Then who is the Griffon?” Keen retorted.

“Oh, hell, give me another drink. I give up,” moaned Lang, staring at the typewritten sheet again. “But how am I going to explain that \$100,000 Marsh is supposed to have received. Where is it?”

“A lot of people would like to know,” Keen responded. “But what more do you want, Lang? Don’t be unreasonable.”

“I’d like to know how you got this stuff signed by Blandon, down in Baltimore, to me up here in New York.”

“It doesn’t say it was written or signed in Baltimore, does it?” asked Keen.

“I give up,” Lang said, grabbing the packet of plans and rushing for the door. “But you wait, Keen. That guy Griffon will give himself away yet.”

“If he does, you’ll be out of a job,” taunted Keen.

Lang tore the door open and charged out.

AN hour later, Barney came in, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“All’s well. A beautiful landing, and everythin’s as snug as a bug.”

“Splendid, Barney. Have a snort of O’Doul’s for your work. By the way, we’re running low on supplies. How about it?”

“What’ll we use for money?” demanded Barney.

“Money? Oh, yes, currency. Now, let me see. I had a little packet here somewhere. Ah, here it is.” Keen drew out another yellow envelope. “There’s a hundred grand, in the argot of the gutter. Try to stretch it out a bit, this time, will you?”

Barney stared into the envelope. His fingers ran through it for a minute. Then he smiled, walked across the studio and opened a small wall safe, fitted behind a golf club plaque.

“Mr. Marsh was careless about his money, too, eh?” he asked.

“Not nearly as careless as he was about shooting other people’s automatics, Barney. By the way, I must reload the old Backbiter. We may need it again, one of these days.”

And with that, Kerry Keen took the reverse-action pistol down from the wall, where it had been all the time since his hurried return from Gray-fields two nights beforehand reloaded the trick mechanism. For two automatics had been taken down from the wall that night, and only one had been replaced.

No wonder Drury Lang was puzzled.