

The Crimson Wizard—Thunder Over London

Britons Are Pawns in Grim Game of Red Circle

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA

PETER QUILL, a hunchback, inventor of invisible lightning with affinity for explosives and capable of destroying battleships.
ALLAN TYLER, chief of secret bureau.
ERIC LAMBERT, designer of super-battleships.
MAIDA TRAVERS, radio singer, beloved by Lambert.

IVAN MOLOKOFF, assistant engineer of radio station.
PETROVICH, embassy attaché.
SONYA DANILO, beautiful and mysterious figure in plot against Peter Quill and his lightning.
MICHAEL RACLOV, assistant of Sonya.
HERR KALMITZ, Red Circle agent, director of Berlin radio station.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING INSTALMENTS

At a public inquiry into theft of Eric Lambert's plans for a super battleship, and the attempted kidnapping of Peter Quill—a kidnapping forestalled by Maida Travers—Ivan Molokoff, Red Circle agent, is killed. Sonya Danilo, believed to be the fiery, beautiful Red agent, is suspected. She eludes Allan Tyler's dragnet and with Comrade Petrovich boards the liner Gigantic, which is taking Maida to Europe where she is to study voice. Michael Raclov is also aboard, and in the excitement caused when Sonya explodes a bomb on the ship, he takes off in a trans-Atlantic catapult plane with Maida as his prisoner. Back on land Sonya spies on Peter Quill's tests of his ray. Maida and Raclov, forced down on an uninhabited island of the Hebrides, finally repair the plane and take off just as Raclov's brother is executed in Moscow during a Red purge. "Captured" by British army planes, Raclov and Maida are freed by Gorin, another Red Circle agent, and continue to Berlin. There Herr Kalmitz offers Maida a radio contract if she will induce Peter Quill to come to her assistance. Seeing the trap to ensnare Quill, Sonya agrees, but sings instead a warning to Eric during an international broadcast. Sonya and Petrovich are captured at W-G-N, and unknown to them their conversation is broadcast. They say Peter Quill will join the Red Circle to be near Maida in Moscow—where she is to be taken because of her warning to Eric. Quill disappears, along with his blueprints, and eludes secret agents, boarding a Russian power yacht which takes him to a destroyer beyond the three mile limit.

By SPECIAL AGENT

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MAIDA TRAVERS had been swallowed up. Her voice had been last heard from Berlin. Then there was silence. The silence gripped Eric Lambert like some giant hand and held him fast. He telephoned the state department almost hourly. Officials act slowly. Each message moves in a groove, each step is like every other step. Lambert could only ask questions. Each reply was a hopeless negative.

Allan Tyler called him to the secret service bureau. "I think we have our hand on the door," he said abruptly.

"You've heard from Maida?" Lambert's face carried a glint of hope.

"No." And Lambert sank back into the tense anxiety that had held him since the night when Maida was snatched from the deck of the Gigantic.

"But we are on the trail of Peter Quill," Tyler went on.

"Crimson Peter Quill," Lambert's voice dropped. "I have always thought that disloyalty and treason were the worst words that could be said of any American. Now they are mild and inadequate. When I think what Peter Quill can do with his horrible invisible lightning, I tell you, Mr. Tyler, I want to contrive something desperate."

"It will have to be that," said Mr. Tyler. "For Peter Quill is aboard a soviet vessel. And he is going straight to Moscow. If that doesn't call for desperate measures I don't know what danger is."

"Can't that Red ship be stopped?"

"Perhaps. But first we must find the ship. We don't know which ship."

"Then Peter Quill did make a run for the open sea?"

"Yes," said Tyler. "We are sure he was picked out of the lower river by a power yacht. We know from the reports of the police boats that a power yacht got clear of the harbor with all motors open."

Lambert made a gesture of impatience. "No one would be insane enough to attempt the Atlantic in such a craft."

"I think that's a good guess," Tyler agreed. "And we are following that guess. We think that the power yacht put Peter Quill aboard a soviet war vessel."

"Then the power boat must have come back to land."

"Precisely. We have questioned the captain and crew. They say they made a short trip to test their engines. In fact, they have never heard of Peter Quill."

Lambert leaped to his feet. "England could head off that craft."

"They are going to try," said Tyler calmly. "I have already asked both the navy and the air admiralty to send out scouts."

There was a tap on Tyler's door. A secretary brought a

radiogram. "Here," said Tyler, "listen to this." He read: "Squadrons of pursuit and scout planes have been ordered to watch for soviet vessel. Naval records indicate that vessel is a destroyer of high speed."

The hunt for Peter Quill was on. The cables and the radio telegraph were pulsing with dispatches in those first hours. The search began with the first message to the British air admiralty.

It was this message that set the air admiralty in motion:



"Crimson Peter Quill," Lambert's voice dropped. "I have always thought disloyalty and treason were the worst words that could be said of any American." (Tribune Studio photo.)

"Peter Quill, inventor of invisible lightning, an electrical wave capable of exploding ammunition in ships and forts, has fled America. He is aboard Russian vessel moving toward Baltic sea. Please intercept the vessel and take off Peter Quill. If he reaches Moscow the fate of the world's navies is at stake."

The fastest military planes from Turnhouse airport at Edin-



(Acme photo.) From hundreds of grim hiding places anti-aircraft guns appeared.

burgh were directed to watch the Scottish waters. The sea about the north of Scotland was set off in imaginary squares. Each square thus marked off on the charts was swept by the observers in the planes.

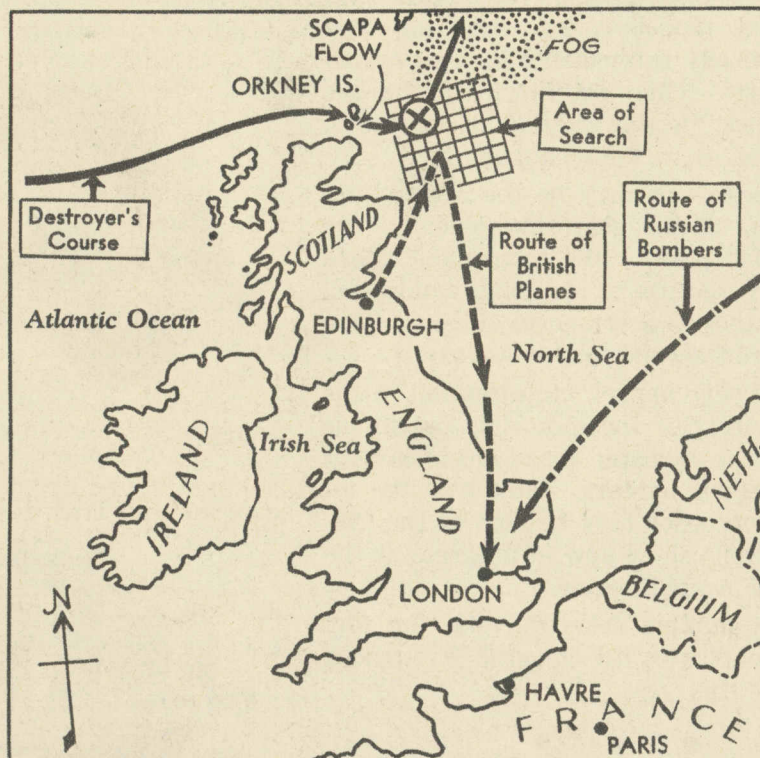
II.

It is impossible to think in terms of modern speed. Once there was the speed of the wind. Once there was the speed of a fine horse. Once there was the



(Photo from Tribune London Bureau.)

Britain's airmen and her fastest fighting planes were mobilized with well practiced speed for the search.



How the British admiralty found—and lost—the ship bearing Peter Quill.

know but that the bombing planes might be contemplating the kind of incident which is so easily explained—after the evil is done? Incidents in war can always be explained. They can be paid for in apologies and money. But there will be dead men—and women and children.

England was ready. For months the war ministry had been laboring day and night against bomb and gas attack. London newspapers had been publishing advertisements for gas masks and for bomb and gas shelters.

Protection against bombs! What is a bomb from the air? The contact bomb explodes when it strikes. The armor-piercing bomb penetrates. The semi-armor-piercing bomb also penetrates. These last two are fitted with fuses. When a 500-pound high-explosive bomb strikes there occurs a fury which may be likened to a thousand tornadoes. The violence of this explosion at the point of impact lasts only one-thousandth of a second. But this fraction of time is enough to demolish almost anything within the space of fifty feet as a puff of wind dissipates a pinch of dust.

Gas penetrates. No one can escape except it be with the greatest care. Masks must be worn. Shelters must be built. Doors must be stopped up at every crack. Keyholes must be covered. Fireplaces must be closed. Carpets are nailed against windows to prevent flying glass. Medical supplies and food and clothing must be provided. Relief stations are established in every hamlet. London is charted, with exact directions for every inhabitant. Fire companies have special routines to follow. Each hospital becomes a gas-relief station. Doctors and nurses are organized.

The Russian bombers were over the channel. The anti-aircraft guns about London were thrown into action. Heavier artillery was got ready.

Later in the evening there was a radio from the Hawker Hurricanes off the Shetland Islands: "We are circling the destroyer. Shall we open fire?"

Hawker Hurricane planes are flying fortresses. Each plane carries eight machine guns. Four machine guns are placed in each

wing. Eight guns are in a position to rake a warship with a hail of bullets. Life would not be comfortable on such a deck.

The admiralty responded: "Mark the course of the destroyer. Leave planes to watch it. Return to London with all speed. We are threatened with a bomb attack by a Russian air squadron."

The commander of the Hawker Hurricanes signaled his leaders. Like a flight of eagles the airplanes swung widely in air and set a course for London. Three planes were left to circle and watch the course of the destroyer.

III.

No one can describe death. One may describe only the fear of death. No one has ever returned from death to paint its arrival and its relentless workings. Death is the mind functioning upon expectation. Death was flying before the wind over London.

Something hellish slid out of the skies over Barking Level. None could see it. None could know it was coming. The fears of the waiting village folk could be seen in their faces. Only faces can communicate such terror. Such terror comes when the mystery of death whirrs smoothly in the air. Something splashed in the River Thames. It was as if a boy had tossed a

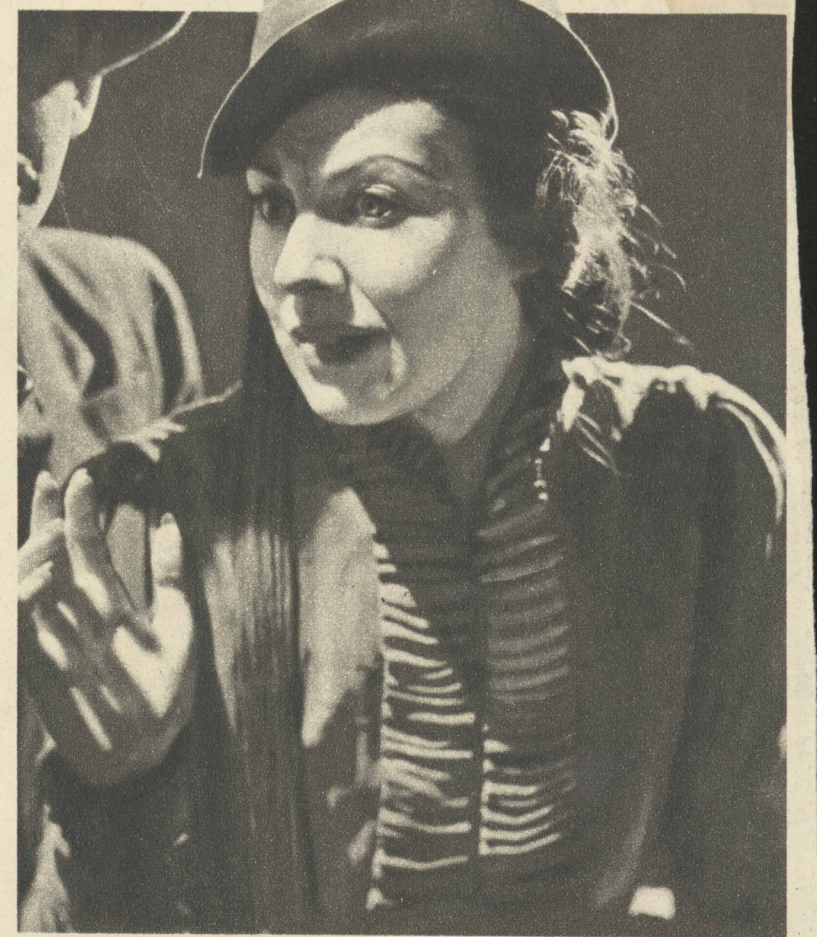


(Acme photo.)

Strange beings filled London's streets . . . police, soldiers, firemen.

stone. There was a slight ripple. The ripple endured for so brief a time that one could not estimate it. Then it was as if a clap of all the world's thunders had struck the Thames at Barking Level. There was a rush of mighty wind. A giant mountain of water leaped out of the river. Those on shore turned to run. They were thrown flat. Those in boats toppled upon the crest of a watery volcano. The mountain of water fell with a roar. It was the first bomb.

Now all the region of London leaped to defense. This is large-scale geometry. The boy who sketches his first triangle on a school paper will have the sense of it. He will understand that an anti-aircraft gun fires a deafening charge high into the air. He will also know that there must be a meeting place in the sky where the explosive and the enemy airplane must meet. This is the geometry of motion. It is a plane moving faster than the wind and a projectile moving faster than sound. The school-boy could not possibly sketch the simplest triangle on paper in the time required to sketch this triangle of disaster in the



(Tribune Studio photo.)

Maida Travers had been swallowed up in a vast fog of silence.

sky. Anti-aircraft guns are fired as rapidly as a boy snaps his fingers.

Hundreds of these guns sprang out of their dull and somber resting places. From Barking the guns of Essex seemed to cough an acrid poison as their shells whistled eerily heavenward. From Hornsey and Willesden, from Ealing and Surbiton and all the intervening posts there was ranged a circle of drumming cannon; drumming and spitting death into the clouds. None could see the Red squadron. The Red bombers were thousands of feet above London. The fear of death was whirling smoothly out of the clouds.

The bomb that wrenched the placid surface of the Thames had hardly spent its echoes when the storm burst. Over Stepney and Shoreditch there were hurricanes of dust and smoke as the bombs fell. The City suddenly became a forgotten city. The staid Bank of England was wound round in a shroud of pungent and blinding fumes. Every worker in that great building hurried to a task set for him in

glared into space. The fingers of the gunners played incessantly over the guns as the fingers of a pianist run over the keys to make sure that all is in tune. At 400 miles an hour the Hawker Hurricanes were roaring south.

The pilots and gunners could see nothing, but they could hear. Their ear phones drank in the steady flow of briefly spoken messages from the air admiralty. "The Russians are circling over London." "A salvo of bombs has just exploded over Kensington Garden." "Battersea Park is a blanket of smoke from the blasting we've just got there." "Clapham Park has just got a terrific strafing." "Now we're getting it over Dulwich." "The bombs are coming in a perfectly devilish hail over the Observatory park, Greenwich."

There was a pause in the radio messages. Then came the voice of the admiralty again. This time it was a startled, biting voice. "Calling scout flight, North sea."

"Yes, sir," came the prompt answer from the flight leader who had been left to watch the course of the Red destroyer.

"What's the weather?" "Heavy clouds, sir. Low ceiling. Dense fog ahead."

Then there was another silence. Again the silence was broken by the crisp tones from the admiralty. "Calling squadron One-Hundred-Eleven; calling squadron One-Hundred-Eleven—"

This was the eagle flight of Hawker Hurricanes bearing down on London. "Yes, sir," came the answer. "This is One-Hundred-Eleven."

The admiralty voice again: "Listen carefully both of you, North sea and One-Eleven."

"Right, sir," from the North sea.

"Right, sir," from One-Eleven.

And then the admiralty: "Something is wrong. The Red bombers have swung back over the channel. The explosions were all in the air, as near as we can find; all smoke explosions, no shells. It begins to look like a gigantic fraud attack. Listen, One-Eleven: Turn right about and close in on the Red destroyer. And North sea flight, attention."

"Yes, sir."

"What's the position of the destroyer?"

"Sir, the destroyer has just gone head-on into a fog so thick you could sit on it."

The Reds had estimated the weather almost to the second. The low ceiling, the clouds, and the north fog had been accurately predicted. The Red bombers, armed with harmless noise and smoke bombs, had put London into its first general alarm. But London had learned what to do in the face of fear. The Hawker Hurricanes had been called away from the attack on the destroyer. The destroyer had plunged into the fog precisely in the click of "me."

Peter Quill had escaped!

IV.

The Hawker Hurricanes, sweeping out of the North sea, were over York. The eyes of the pilots were straining into the ethereal depths of that mysterious land where men fight like eagles. The eyes of the gunners

("The Crimson Wizard" will continue on W-G-N next Friday at 9 p. m. and in next Sunday's Graphic Section.)