

The Crimson Wizard—Murder in the Dark!

Chief Tyler's Inquiry Into Spy Plot Brings a Strange Turn of Events

CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA

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

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING INSTALLMENT

Naval archives building is burned and Eric Lambert's plan for superbattleship stolen by spies of Red Circle. Allan Tyler enlists radio for publicity campaign to destroy Red Circle, decides to hold inquiry into fire and robbery, and receives radiogram telling him to look out for the Firefly, beautiful and dangerous agent of Red Circle.

By SPECIAL AGENT*

(Secret Records, File 685.)

(Copyright: 1938: The Chicago Tribune.)

AN OPEN taxicab is rolling along Pennsylvania avenue. It is followed by a coupé carrying two men. One of these men holds a pistol. A third car appears. Suddenly the taxicab scuttles away in a rattle of gears. The coupé with the two men races in pursuit.

Up the avenue these automobiles run like mad; the taxicab gathering speed, the coupé gaining; in the coupé the man with the pistol leans coldly forward. Only a few persons are in the avenue at this time of evening. On the sidewalk there stands a radio announcer with a portable microphone preparing to broadcast one of those haphazard interviews with pedestrians. Near

So swiftly as this can small things become the intensest drama.

II.

Almost before the police could begin their work Allan Tyler was there. Nor was this mysterious. Mr. Tyler considered that as chief of the secret bureau he should endure no less labor than his agents. He had spent day and night in his own car.

"Dwarf?" He repeated the word that came to him of the strange figure in the taxicab.

"Dwarf?" he said again. "Then it was Peter Quill!"

The police were returning from the wrecked automobiles. Mr. Tyler glanced at the sagging form of the girl who had been

"And this man with you?" he asked.

"My chauffeur," said Petrovich.

Mr. Tyler's eye ran over the crowd. Near a small tree were three persons. One was a girl. One of the men with her carried a violin case. The other held a guitar.

"Gypsy musicians," Mr. Tyler mused. And his thoughts went back to the robbery of the naval building. A newsboy had seen a girl and two men there. Then his mind coupled another fact. It was the radiogram warning him of the Firefly.

"Firefly," he muttered, and turned to Maida Travers, who was slowly returning to consciousness.

III.

If you had been standing near the three musicians you might have overheard a strange conversation. The girl was speaking rapidly. "They call us the Red Circle," she was saying. "Well, they shall see that the Red Circle can become very hard to break."

"Tell me, Sonya," said the man with the violin, "what is it that our country wants of him?"

The girl called Sonya threw him a look of impudence from her black eyes. "Michael," she said, "you have been very important to the Circle. You managed to get the battleship plans a week ago, didn't you? Then you should know that Peter Quill is the important thing, not the ships. You have stopped the building of ships, because without plans there are no ships. But with Peter Quill there is his destroying electricity. We shall have his invisible lightning. That will destroy all the ships."

Michael Raclov, young, handsome, and attentive in his colorful gypsy clothing, thrust his violin under his flowing cape and made a gesture of caution. Sonya suddenly went silent. Then she made a sign of departure with her pretty head. "Come, Michael," she said softly. "Come, Vasily." This last to the guitar player.

The three gypsies quietly made their way out of the crowd. "Comrade Petrovich won't need us any more," said Sonya.

"I still don't see what we came for," grumbled the one called Vasily.

"Of course not," said Sonya. "But had Comrade Petrovich been successful in making the acquaintance of Peter Quill there might have been a need for witnesses. As it is there is no reason why we should expose ourselves to the foolish questions of the police."

The gypsies were out of sight of the crowd and turning the first corner. "I hear some one calling," this from Vasily.

"Hurry," said Sonya.

Mr. Tyler's impatience was no small thing when he found that the gypsy musicians had gone without the permission of the policeman.

"I told them to stay," the officer repeated over and over again.

"So they went," said Mr. Tyler abruptly. "They would have been useful in the inquiry. Petrovich is accredited to the embassy. I can't hold him."

Petrovich and his chauffeur did not offer to stay. They made off down the avenue.

Mr. Tyler took Maida with him in his squad car. He was beginning to wonder if the secret service inquiry he had called for this night was to accomplish anything. He would hold an open session, that he was sure of. He was determined that the public must know all the truth. The people must understand the dangers they are facing. The whole fabric of the foreign spy system must be exposed.

IV.

Washington is beautiful in the night lights. From the capitol the city sweeps away in avenues of magnificent buildings to the silvery Potomac and over the mists in the Virginia hills. It is a city of light. It is a city of frankness and open dealing. But it is a city of dark corners and secrecy and espionage. But it

is also a city in which every one watches every one else. It is a city in which each clerk watches the one next him and the one next above and the one next below. It is a city in which each official shrewdly observes every other official. It is a city in which each wife watches each other wife, and particularly the wives of those above her. It is a city in which ambassadors and ministers and attachés are surrounded by their own spies and by the spies of all the others. Spies are watching spies. One uses the telephone with a feeling that a form lurks in the basement with a listening device at his ear.

Mr. Tyler's car drew up at the secret service bureau. He spoke briefly to the agent with him. "Take Miss Travers in with you," he said. "I'll wait here."

Once inside the bureau and under the care of the matron, Maida was soon herself again. Mr. Tyler waited until he was alone. When he was sure of this he walked rapidly across the street. He stood in a doorway where he could see the arrival of the witnesses he had called for the inquiry. This seemed an unnecessary expedient, however, for the first person he saw was Eric Lambert. It was not his intention to spy on Lambert. He hailed him.

"Walk with me to the corner," he said. "I need some one to clear my head."

"I don't think I can help much, Mr. Tyler. The fact is, I think my own nerves are getting me."

Mr. Tyler smiled only with the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. "Can I ask you an abrupt question? Are you deeply devoted to Maida Travers?"

"What has that to do with— I'm sorry. Yes, it is personal, Mr. Tyler, but I suppose I can say that we are engaged to be married."

Mr. Tyler nodded. They walked slowly along the street. "I understand your nerves," resumed Mr. Tyler. "You haven't seen Maida Travers in several days."

"That's it! How did you know?" Eric Lambert grasped the detective's arm. "She has been gone all this week. She left Chicago. She has

pose he is," said Mr. Tyler. "Thank you for walking with me. I think Comrade Molokoff has just left Comrade Petrovich in the shadow of that tree at the corner. It was what I expected."

When Molokoff had entered the bureau the two men turned. "Petrovich?" Eric Lambert stared hard at Mr. Tyler.

"Comrade Petrovich," corrected Mr. Tyler. "And he has just missed kidnaping Peter Quill."

"Kidnaping Peter Quill? And who prevented it?"

They were entering the bureau. Mr. Tyler led the way to his private office. Lambert continued pressing his questions. "Robbery . . . arson . . . and now kidnaping Peter Quill. Mr. Tyler, what can we do?"

"We can compliment the lady who prevented the kidnaping," said Mr. Tyler. And he thrust Lambert forward toward a chair in which sat Maida Travers.

"Darling!" cried Eric.



MAIDA TRAVERS. She ran into the room and stopped short. Then she drew back and screamed.

"Are you sure that Peter Quill himself hasn't gone over to the—"

"To the Red Circle?" Mr. Tyler made a little humming sound but offered no reply. Then he said: "If the Red Circle gets Peter Quill's devastating invention before your battleships can be built it will be the end of us, won't it?"

"It will be the end of the world, Mr. Tyler."

"Then," said the detective, "that's the thing to worry about."

"But Maida—" Lambert began.

Mr. Tyler's fingers clutched his wrist. "Quiet!" he said. "Is that Molokoff across the way?" He indicated a rapidly walking figure.

"Why, yes, of course. The assistant engineer of the radio station. On his way to the hearing."

"I suppose he is," said Mr. Tyler. "Thank you for walking with me. I think Comrade Molokoff has just left Comrade Petrovich in the shadow of that tree at the corner. It was what I expected."

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"Darling!" cried Eric.

"I couldn't help it, Eric," said Maida. "Something told me they were going to harm that poor, wretched scrap of humanity. And Molokoff—"

"Has he been threatening Peter Quill?"

"O, not threatening; frightening, rather. I tell you, Eric, there is nothing in the world so horrible as fright. I know that from watching the face of Peter Quill. Sometimes the look in his face is so dreadful that he must wish he had never been born."

V.

Mr. Tyler had left the office for the council room, where the inquiry awaited him. A secret service agent invited Lambert to the witness chair. He left Maida hurriedly. She remained alone in Mr. Tyler's office, the door of which was left open so she might hear the proceedings without being seen. She heard Eric Lambert retrace his steps in the design of the giant battleships. She heard him tell what he knew of the robbery; how his plans had been stolen; in what danger the country lay with the spies of the Red Circle contriving plot and counterplot.

"And not only naval plans are threatened," said he, "but the morale of the nation. Spies of the Red Circle are penetrating everywhere—in colleges, in churches, among citizens' societies of every kind."

When he had concluded Mr. Tyler called Molokoff to the chair. The witness was in an evil mood. He had hardly begun to answer questions than he swung off into a veneer of suspicious suggestions against Peter Quill.

"You called his name on the radio," said Mr. Tyler sharply. "Why?"

Molokoff's face went livid. He clutched the arms of his chair and drew himself upright. He stared insolently about the inquiry room. The faces of the spectators went from shy grins to a kind of terror.

"Peter Quill!" he half shouted. "Wizard Quill . . . Red

Wizard . . . yes, Crimson Wizard . . ."

There was a click of an electrical switch. The lights went out. The room went black dark save for a dull yellow haze that seemed to float from the vague night into the council chamber through an uncurtained window.

There was a swift succession of gasps. Mr. Tyler called out above the indistinct murmurs, "Who turned those lights off?"

There was a silence, as if an answer were expected.

Then three quick pistol shots, like the rapping of steel knuckles on an oak table. An acrid odor of gunpowder stole into the nostrils.

Mr. Tyler roared: "Close the doors! Quick! The lights!"

The great chandelier hanging from the center of the room slowly glowed with the illumination of twoscore bulbs. Maida Travers ran into the room and stopped short. Then she drew back and screamed. She pointed to the floor below the long council table.

"He's dead!"

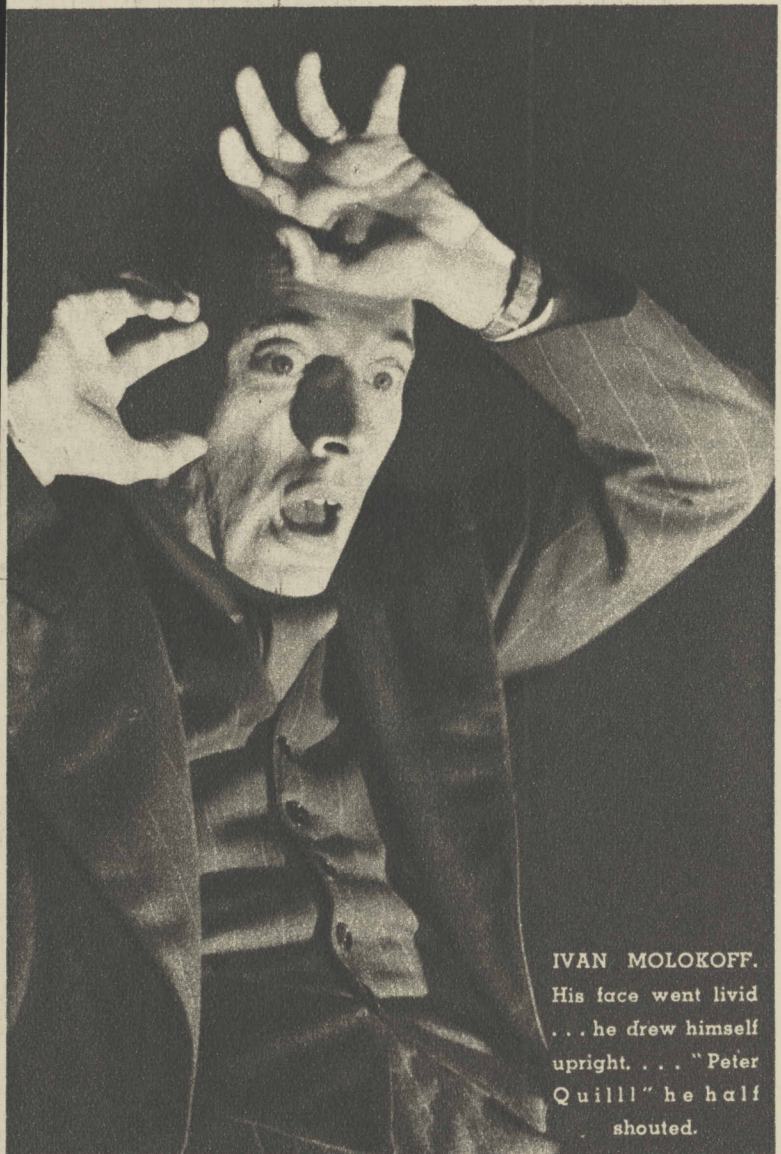
Mr. Tyler stepped swiftly to her side. "Molokoff!" he muttered in a gritty tone. Only the heavy breathing of the massed spectators attested their frozen horror. There was the sound of shambing, uneven footsteps. All turned toward the door. It was Peter Quill.

Another moment of stillness. Then, as if out of nowhere, there came a long ripple of a woman's sardonic laugh. Mr. Tyler ran to the door and threw it open. The corridor was empty. He glanced all about him, then down. He leaned quickly over and snatched something from the floor. This he examined with exacting minuteness.

It was a bit of paper fashioned to represent a large, colorful insect.

"Firefly," Mr. Tyler whispered softly.

"The Crimson Wizard" will continue on W-G-N next Friday at 8 p. m. and next Sunday's Graphic Section.)



IVAN MOLOKOFF. His face went livid . . . he drew himself upright. . . . "Peter Quill!" he half shouted.

(Tribune Studio photos.)

him stands a policeman. Both these men swing about and stare at the racing automobiles.

"Some one's going to be hurt," calls the radio announcer.

Precisely as he says it the third car makes a new burst of speed. In this third car is a girl, alone. Her face is devoid of expression, but her eyes are burning with a kind of eagerness and determination. The taxicab now comes opposite the radio announcer. He quickly surveys the three vehicles as they shoot past.

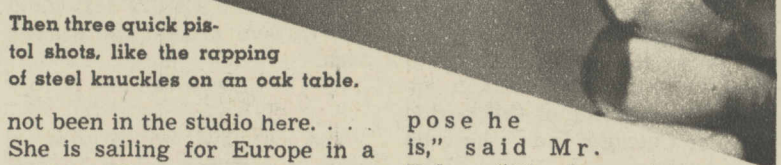
"Look in the taxi!"

The policeman looks. "A dwarf," he gasps. He has caught only the briefest glance at the cowering figure in the open cab. There he has seen a queer form. It is a form hardly human. The head is too great for the strangely small body.

"The girl!" This is a shout from the announcer.

He has hardly more than formed the words when a crash comes. The girl has sent her small motor car into terrific speed. It bolts past the coupé containing the two men. Then she seizes her wheel with a deliberate left turn and swings her car directly in the path of the coupé. Both cars go tumbling over and over in a shocking medley of discordant, splitting, and repellent crashes. Then it is quiet.

*Since secrecy is the basis of a mystery, it is needless to point out that the characters here named are nonexistent. In furtherance of the mystery tempo Special Agent relies for interest upon Secret Records, File 685, as noted above.



Then three quick pistol shots, like the rapping of steel knuckles on an oak table.

not been in the studio here. . . . She is sailing for Europe in a week—"

Mr. Tyler cut him off. "Tell me about Peter Quill," he said gently.

Lambert walked a few steps in silence. "I know that Maida holds a tremendous influence over that fantastic hunchback. Well, he adores her. O, it isn't love; not the love that you and I think of," he interposed quickly. "It is a kind of prayer that one would direct toward a divinity, if I make myself clear. He thinks that Maida took him out of misery and gave him a human mind. I tell you, it is the most extravagant thing you ever heard of—"

Again Mr. Tyler stopped him. "The Red spies have got your plans for the 75,000-ton battleships. How long will it take you to replace them?"

"Months."

"And the Reds have got wind of Peter Quill's formula and plans."

Do You Want to See a Broadcast?

The Crimson Wizard is broadcast every Friday evening at 8 o'clock from the audience studio of W-G-N. There are seating facilities for 600 guests. If you wish to attend one of these broadcasts, fill out this coupon and mail it to THE CRIMSON WIZARD, care of Station W-G-N, Tribune Tower, Chicago.

Name

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Number of tickets wanted