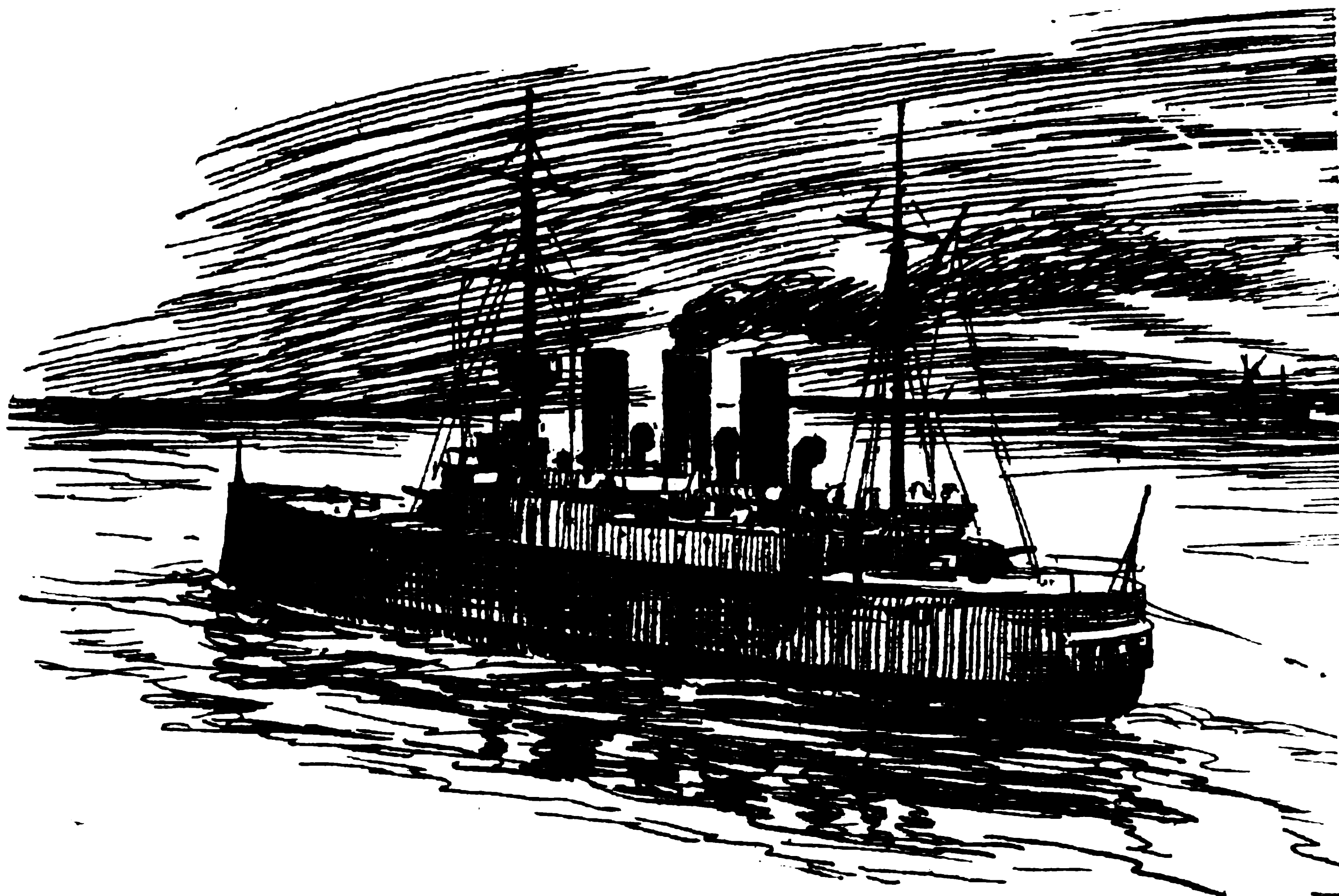


THE CLAWS OF



Nelson Lee, the famous detective, is one of five stalwart explorers who have discovered a lost island inhabited by cave-men and shipwrecked pilgrims. This amazing story deals with the English detective's remarkable adventures when he sets out to liberate the lost community from the tyranny of Black Hawk, the pirate.

CHAPTER 1.

The Rival Forces.

DAWN in the great cavern. The grey light came filtering down from the mile-wide gap in the roof, two thousand feet above. And that pale, ghostly light revealed a scene of strife.

There was grim warfare between the rival forces of the People of the Mist. Simeon Harko, the tyrant, with all the rough men of the community under his command, had vainly attempted to quell the rebellion. The rest of the people, peaceful and kindly, had been putting up a great fight for liberty. Peace would not come to this community until the Black Hawk was smashed.

And in all this strife a party of sturdy Britishers was mixed up—a party consisting of Nelson Lee, the famous detective; Nipper,

his assistant; Lord Dorrimore, the sporting peer; Umlosi, King of the Kutanas—and the one and only Edward Oswald Handforth, of St. Frank's.

They were on the side of the People of the Mist—helping them to crush the tyrant.

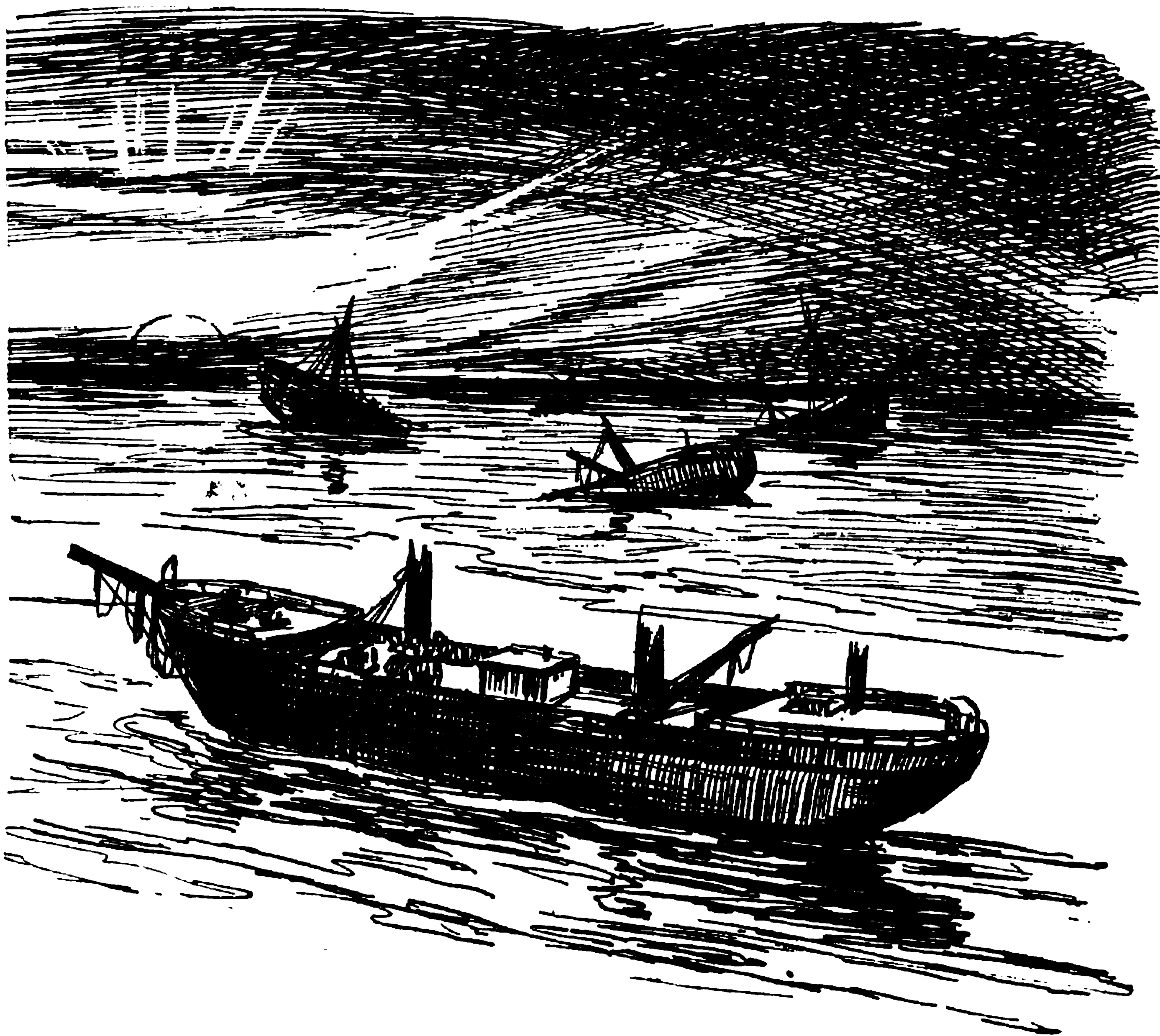
NELSON LEE'S party had had many exciting adventures since they had first arrived on this extraordinary island by aeroplane. It was situated in the very heart of the Sargasso Sea, surrounded by dense masses of choking weed, hidden by the eternal mists which hung over the region, blotting it out from any ships which chanced to be out of their course and which came near.

The island itself was a great rock which reared itself out of the weed three thousand

—Another Great E. S. Brooks Adventure Story!

THE HAWK!

By
E. S.
BROOKS.



feet; and on all sides there were sheer, impassable cliffs.

In the cavern lived the descendants of pilgrims—people who had lived in this lonely corner of the world for centuries. Never had they been able to reach the Outer World. For any ship which became entangled in this dense part of the Sargasso, never escaped.

On the top of the island another race of humans existed—prehistoric man! Yet these Islanders were not so formidable as the adventurers had first believed; and now, indeed, they were on friendly terms, and had been helping to defeat the Black Hawk.

It was not even certain that Nelson Lee and his companions would ever escape to the other world; for Lord Dorrimore's great

'plane, the Sky Wanderer, was lying crippled on the island top. Before she could take to the air again she must undergo drastic repairs—and such repairs, in all probability, could not be undertaken on the island. That meant exile for them all—exile for life!

THE strengthening daylight revealed much activity. Nelson Lee himself was superintending the rebuilding of the rock wall which had been built entirely round the cavern township. It was a defence-work, and it had been breached during the night—when the Black Hawk and his desperadoes had broken through. Only in the nick of time had Lord Dorrimore arrived with a strong force of the sturdy Islanders.

"We'll soon have the defences as secure as ever again, Dorrie," said Lee confidently. "The people are more determined than ever, and I don't think it will be long before the Black Hawk throws up the sponge."

"He'll never do that," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "He's a ruffian, but he's no quitter."

"I did not mean that—exactly."

"Then what's the answer?" asked Lord Dorrimore, staring. "Oh, I think I know what you mean! The Hawk's men will surrender on their own account?"

"That is what I believe," replied Lee, nodding. "And once the pirates do that, Dorrie, the Hawk himself will be beaten. There will be no alternative for him but to give in. And the sooner that hour comes, the better."

The recent battle had been a severe test for all. Owing to the merest fluke, Lee had fallen into the hands of the enemy; and he had even been made to walk the plank in the true pirato style! But he had been saved from that dreadful fate by Umlosi.

Nelson Lee's supposed death had taken the heart out of the defenders, and they would certainly have succumbed to the Black Hawk's attack—but for the sudden reappearance of Lee. The pirates believed that he was a ghost, and they fled in terror. The People of the Mist themselves regarded Lee's return as something of a miracle, and never before had they been so heartened. This morning they were agog with such enthusiasm that it was good to see them.

Everything was going with perfect smoothness.

Men were working at the defences; others were preparing a mighty breakfast for all. The women were helping gaily, and they had forgotten their terror of the night. A spirit of optimism prevailed. For not only had "Master Lee" returned, but with him were his sturdy companions from the Outer World. There could be no defeat now.

And just as this optimism flooded through the People of the Mist, so a corresponding wave of pessimism affected the Black Hawk's men. They had all retreated to a squat, ugly steel cruiser which lay in the big lake towards the centre of the cavern. This cruiser, once the pride of the Parazilian Navy, had been abandoned in mid-ocean, and had drifted, derelict, into the Sargasso. This had happened years earlier, and the People of the Mist had managed to get the vessel into the cavern.

Although quite obsolete as cruisers go nowadays, the Porto Marlo was, nevertheless, a fairly modern vessel. She was of steel, her sides were streaked with rust, and she possessed guns and all the equipment of modern warfare. This craft was the Black Hawk's headquarters. In fact, there was no other place for him, since he and his men had been driven into the lake, and they had sought refuge on the Porto Marlo in desperation.

It was an apt enough camp for such men—for they were, at heart, ruthless pirates.

It was the Black Hawk's love of piracy, in fact, which had first persuaded Lee to come upon this adventure. For these desperate men had actually taken the cruiser out through the weed—after fitting her up with a great cutter which divided the weed, and a cage-like arrangement at her stern which protected her propellers. The pirates had held up a modern liner, and had looted her. And it was the Black Hawk's ambition to repeat that escapade—and to go on repeating it. He wanted to gain more and more booty.

And when his plans had been completely made, Nelson Lee's party had arrived, and, metaphorically speaking, a spanner had been thrown into the machinery.

It had taken these untrained men several years to discover the elementary workings of the cruiser's engines. When they had finally got the furnaces going, and had raised steam, and had set the vessel in motion, it was something of a triumph. Even Lee, knowing the men to be blackguards, could not help admiring them for their perseverance and for their courage. For it had needed courage of a very sterling nature for these men to venture forth in a steam-driven ship. They had been like children playing with fire—and the miracle of it was that they had succeeded in getting to the open sea, in holding up a liner, and in returning.

They were all in very much the same boat. Normal sleep had been denied them for days. They had snatched hours here and there. Yet they were not excessively tired, for there was so much to do that they could not afford to feel tired.

Nipper was working as sturdily as the others, and he believed, like everybody else, that the worst was over. If the Black Hawk did not surrender at once, it would now only be a matter of time. With the People of the Mist so heartened, and with reinforcements so near at hand, there was not one chance in a thousand that the enemy could prevail—or, indeed, even make another attack.

The hairy men from the island top—once known as Beast Men, and now referred to more respectfully as the Islanders—had made a camp for themselves, at Dorrie's suggestion, a mile or two outside the town. They were ready enough to come into action should they be needed. So far, these warriors had done no fighting; for their very appearance, with Nelson Lee at their head, had served to rout the enemy during the night.

Handforth was conspicuous by his absence—and so, too, was Umlosi. They had both hurried away, after the issue had been decided, to the great waterfall at the further end of the ten-mile cavern. It was a considerable journey, for after they had reached the waterfall, they made their way by a secret pass behind it, and thence into a great tunnel—which, in turn, communicated with a deep ravine.

They were obliged to climb this, and it was thus some hours before they reached the island top.

Here they made signs to Horatius, as Dorrie had dubbed the chief of the Islanders—indicating to him that all was well, but that his men would not return for some time.

Their real object in making the journey, however, had been to fetch a sweet girl of sixteen, Amanda Peterson. She was one of the People of the Mist, and earlier Nelson Lee had rescued her from the Black Hawk's clutches. She had been condemned to death, and since then she had been protected by Lee.

Now there was no reason why she should not return to her own people.

Handforth, needless to say, had "fallen"

And Nelson Lee, perhaps, was the only man who appreciated the difficulties. For Lee had formed a true estimate of Simeon Harke's character. The pirate ruffians may be chicken-hearted now, after their defeat—but the Black Hawk would rally them—would fire them with a new enthusiasm. Lee was certain of it.

And never for a second did the detective underestimate the strength and determination of his enemy. Since Simeon Harke had compelled Lee to walk the plank, these two men had taken this warfare to themselves personally. Lee regarded it as a point of honour for him to crush the black-bearded giant who had for so long been the tyrant of the People of the Mist.

CHAPTER 2.

Black Hawk's Fury.

"AMANDA! Amanda comes!"

The cry, uttered by a number of excited girls, was taken up, and echoed by many women—and then re-echoed by the men.

"Amanda!"

The ordinary life of this community was at sixes and sevens. A great many of the people, under normal conditions, lived far out in the cavern, in isolated little "villages," in houses dotted here and there, where families lived on the land as their fathers had lived before them.

But now, owing to the exceptional circumstances, everybody had been drawn into the quaint township, and it was thus overcrowded. Men and women surged forward in excited throngs—as that cry of "Amanda" went up.

The girl was approaching, and she was walking with Handforth—as proud as a peacock—on one side, and with Umlosi on the other. As they neared the defence wall, Amanda could contain her excitement no longer; she broke into a run, and the tears were streaming down her pretty face. Her joy at being once again amongst her own people was so great as to be almost a pain.

he must take instant action—or there might, indeed, be a mutiny.

As the Black Hawk appeared, so the mutterings ceased. Men fell silent and drew back. There were many scores of men on the big decks of the old cruiser. They stood in great crowds, with hang-dog looks and with glowering eyes. Defeat did not suit them.

Deliberately, without uttering a sound, the Black Hawk strode from one deck to another, walking up and down, eyeing the men silently; and his very look made them quail. He was not afraid of them. Unarmed, he went into their midst, daring them to turn on him. And they fell back, afraid. The Black Hawk's strong personality won this strange battle.

Finally he mounted to the vessel's bridge, and from this point of vantage he could address his entire force.

"So, cattle, ye would talk of surrendering?" he said suddenly, his voice like a whip-lash. "Ye would desert me and throw yourselves upon the mercy of Master Lee! Bones and blood! Are ye men, or are ye slugs that crawl in filth?"

He whipped round, addressing another group.

"Let those fools surrender who will!" he went on. "Stand fast by me, and, by my bones, I will lead ye to the greatest victory ye have ever known! Desert me, and you are doomed! Think ye that the people will deal kindly with such rats? Nay! Even if ye escape with your lives, you will be placed in captivity, herded in one of the great caves, placed behind bars and fed like animals! That will be your reward if you surrender."

"Tis said, Sir Chief, that all who surrender will be pardoned, and they will be allowed to resume their normal pursuits," shouted one man.

"Dog!" screamed the Black Hawk. "Take ye notice of such lies? 'Tis but a ruse to entrap ye."

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beaten. Only the Black Hawk himself retained the fighting spirit.

Richard Moore boldly entered his chief's cabin. He was a great, burly brute of a man, over six feet in height. In fact, he was wellnigh as great as the Black Hawk himself. Broad-shouldered, muscular, with a thick beard, he was, in very truth, a brute. And in his present frame of mind he was not afraid of Harke.

"May your marrows rot!" snarled the pirate leader, as his henchman appeared. "What want ye with me? Did I not give orders—"

"The men become restive, Sir Chief," said Richard Moore, quailing under the baleful glare of his chief. "Your talk, it seems, did more harm than good. If ye take no action, the men will go ashore within the hour—and thus shall we few be left aboard, to be taken by the enemy."

"Dogs! Vermin!" raved Simeon Harke, leaping at the others. "Get ye gone! Men who come to me with such talk are unfit for breeding the devil fish!"

He was scarcely responsible for his actions, and he threw himself at Richard Moore with such ferocity that the man was taken unawares. He was frightened, too. Brute though he was, he was no match for his master.

Crash!

The Black Hawk's mighty fist drove into Richard Moore's face like a sledge-hammer. The man went reeling over, clutching at the walls, and he hurtled to the floor, cracking his head in an ugly fashion against a stanchion.

"Now, pig! Get ye out!" panted Simeon Harke.

It spoke eloquently for the thickness of Moore's skull that he sat up; but as he saw Simeon Harke bending over him, he regained some of his scattered wits; and he staggered to his feet and backed out of the cabin. As he did so, the Black Hawk picked a heavy object from the cabin table



There was a blinding flash and a violent explosion as the gas bomb burst in the cabin. Panic-stricken, Black Hawk hurled himself clean through the window !

"'Twas impossible," put in Reresby.

The Hawk thought rapidly. He believed that Richard Moore was dead. The explosion had taken place quite near to the man, and he must have caught the full flood of that deadly vapour. A thought was already stirring in Simcon Harke's mind—a startling thought which, for the moment, positively dazzled him.

It was some little time before the vapour cleared away. Even while the air was still

comparatively thick, the pirate chief plunged down the companion—taking the preliminary precaution to tie a great scarf around his face. He commanded Jonathan Betts and Arthur Reresby to accompany him. They found Richard Moore lying motionless and apparently dead.

He was dragged up to the open, and a bucket of water was flung over him. But this had no effect. The man lay inert, and all about his face there were large numbers

of ugly cuts, which bled freely. It was clear, then, that the exploding shell was of no great violence in itself. Otherwise Moore would have been blown to atoms. Yet he was only cut about by the flying fragments.

"The man is dead," said Jonathan Betts harshly.

"What know ye of such things?" retorted the Hawk. "The Man lives—else his wounds would not bleed."

He bent down, unfastening Moore's clothing; and, sure enough, the man's heart was beating. Not only beating, but beating strongly.

Yet it was a full half-hour before he showed any signs of returning consciousness. Even then he was dull and stupid, and knew nothing of what had happened. He muttered a few words, but all he wanted to do was to sleep.

"A fog which comes forth from the exploding metal things," muttered Simeon Harke, his eyes burning. "A fog which strikes men down with greater certainty than the sword itself! Aye, one man can render twenty helpless! Yet they do not die; they recover after a period of apparent lifelessness."

He paced up and down, and the thoughts in his head were bewildering in the vista of victory they opened.

COMpletely ignorant of explosives and poison-gases, Simeon Harke nevertheless knew that the metal object he had flung—quite by chance—was some engine of modern warfare. What he did not know was that the thing had been a small gas-bomb.

But, owing to age, the bomb had deteriorated. The explosive in it was as potent as ever; but the gas which had been manufactured from a secret formula belonging to the Parazilian Government, was no longer deadly. When those bombs had been supplied, the gas would have killed within a minute. But now the only effect was to cause a deadly choking sensation, a violent sickness, and almost immediate unconsciousness. Providing the victims were quickly supplied with fresh air, they would completely recover. This was because the most deadly poison ingredient of all had become innocuous.

spoke, he spoke softly, so that his voice would reach the men, but would not carry to the land.

"List to me, scum!" said the Black Hawk grimly. "Ye talk of surrender. But I can tell ye of a way in which we can gain a great triumph."

Even as he spoke a new idea came to him—and a cunning light leapt into his eyes.

"Bones and blood! Surrender!" he muttered. "Aye, 'tis a crafty scheme! Already the whispers have reached the people that my men are ripe for surrender!"

He once again addressed himself to the bewildered pirates.

"Below, in one of the steel chambers, repose hundreds of small metal objects," he said impressively. "They have but to be flung, and they spread a great fog, a fog which causes men to fall, writhing in agony. And soon they lay as though dead. You have seen what befell Richard Moore. 'Twas nearly my fate also. Men who suffer from that gas unawares have no means of escape."

"Aye, Sir Chief, but how can we avail ourselves—"

"I will tell you!" interrupted the Hawk. "'Twill be easy enough for all of ye to conceal these metal objects about your persons—and in such a way that their presence will not be apparent. Then ye will cast aside your weapons. In great numbers ye shall take boats, and hasten to the land. Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane shall go, with ye urging ye on, shouting encouragement."

"Faith, but I understand not," said Betts, in wonder.

"Soon ye will know the craftiness of my plans," said the Black Hawk, turning upon him. "As ye all go, I shall be on deck, raving, cursing, calling ye scum and traitors and mutinous dogs. What will

were putting off from the Porto Marlo, and they were all crowded with shouting, angry men. Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane were much in evidence. And the Black Hawk himself raved on the cruiser's deck, shouting, gesticulating, and behaving like a madman.

Even as Nelson Lee concentrated his attention upon the scene, Betts and Lane turned upon their chief, and there was a quick exchange of blows. The Black Hawk went reeling over, to crash upon the deck. The next moment Betts and Lane had stumbled down the ladder and were in one of the boats.

"My only sainted aunt!" yelled Handforth. "Did you see that, Nipper? Those blighters gave the Hawk a dot on the nose!"

"His own lieutenants have turned against him," said Nipper exultantly. "Hurrah! This is the beginning of the end!"

The pirates were already climbing out of the boats and coming ashore. Other boats followed, and soon the men were spreading out in an unruly crowd. The Porto Marlo was left deserted. Simeon Harke had recovered himself by now, and he was alone. Not one of his men remained to stand by him. He was screaming like a maniac, and the plain inference to be drawn from this scene was that he had lost control of his forces.

The men advanced towards the defences, shouting, raising their hands aloft. They were led by Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane, and it was Betts who suddenly turned round upon the men. At the same moment he drew his sword and flung it down with a great clatter upon the hard, rocky ground.

"Away with your arms, men!" he belated, his voice carrying right into the town-ship. "Let the people see that we come with peace in our hearts!"

"Aye, 'tis a good plan!"

"Away with our weapons!"

"We are sick to death with fighting!"

And, meanwhile, the Settlers themselves were playing right into the enemy's hands. Lee could see this—but he could do nothing to stop it. Scores of men were leaving their posts all along the defence walls; they were concentrating in great excited crowds at that section of the wall where the pirates approached.

And the wall itself was being flung down—so that a clear road of entry was made.

Tom Swayne and John Rutter, glowing with triumph, were urging the men on.

Thus, when Jonathan Betts and Simon Lane, leading the pirates, came within twenty feet of the defence wall, there was no longer any wall—but a great gap, on the other side of which crowds of excited men waited.

The Black Hawk's lieutenants were almost frightened by the success of the scheme. Here were the fools, crowding together! A few of those gas bombs, and they would all share the same fate! It was at this moment that Lee, from a little distance, had noticed the movements of the pirates' arms.

"Come, comrades!" growled Betts. "We must seek the forgiveness of our people."

"Aye, we come in shame!" went up the cry.

"But we come to snatch victory!" bellowed Jonathan suddenly. "Up, men! Now!"

Within a split second there was a dramatic, sensational change. Hands flashed out from folds of jackets, and the unsuspecting defenders were startled to see flashes of gleaming metal. Then—

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Shining objects were hurled by the dozen, right into the midst of the waiting crowds. Too late, Tom Swayne and the other section leaders realised that it was a trap. They shouted warnings—



Nelson Lee and Nipper reeled back choking and blinded by the exploding gas bombs. In a moment their defence was broken, and like a devastating tidal wave, the pirates swept down on them.

to him for help. Never for a second did Lee think of going back himself.

And when he considered the other possibility, he brushed it aside. He could order Nipper and Handforth to get through the waterfall tunnel, and to find safety. But he knew well enough that they would not go. They would merely wait—and then follow. Far better, then, for them all to be together.

As they advanced upon the township—now taking another road, which would lead them out near the lake side—Lee eyed the bank of dense vapour. It was drifting so slowly that no movement was perceptible. It hung over the quaint old houses in a grim, brownish-yellow pall.

And it served to mask the approach of the reinforcements.

"This lane will take us, I fancy, through the thinning cloud of vapour," said Lee. "We must make a dash for it there. I don't think the belt will be very thick, and we can soon get through. The air will be clear on the other side—and we shall come upon the Hawk and his men abruptly, unexpectedly. That will give us the advantage."

"An', by the Lord Harry, we'll play skittles with the brutes!" vowed Dorrie.

"Let's get at 'em—that's all!" said Handforth, his eyes burning.

"Wau! Thou

