

# **THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS**

Clifford Goodrich

# Table of Contents

<u>THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS</u> .....	1
<u>Clifford Goodrich</u> .....	1

# THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

Clifford Goodrich

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

As the stout hempen noose tightened about his neck, The Whisperer knew that he had been expected.

The noose dangled from an overhead trestle in the abandoned shipyard. Two blocks away lay the gaunt form of what had once been an ocean liner.

Apparently, it had been anticipated that The Whisperer would investigate the ancient ship. It was now a gaudy hotel and night club known as the Paradise Aquatique.

Four burly forms sprang from the gloom as the noose tightened. One man hauled on a block and tackle, jerking the slight body of the gray, blurry man into the air.

The other three leaped toward the dangling figure. But they didn't touch him. The "supercrook," who was more feared by crooks themselves than by police, moved quickly.

His steely hands seized the rope above him and The Whisperer went up it like a monkey. Twenty feet in the air, a knife whipped from his pocket. The rope parted and the slight body plummeted to earth. It took two of the mobsters with it.

The darkness had aided the would-be killers up to that point. From then on, it seemed in league with The Whisperer. The wispy, gray figure was almost not visible. He seemed everywhere at once; seemed to have as many arms as a centipede has legs.

The thugs flailed with their arms. They were afraid to shoot. They probably would have just killed each other, anyway. A quaint, round-brimmed hat was knocked from the powder-gray hair of The Whisperer. An oddly pointed chin showed dimly in the gloom. The eyes were almost colorless.

A husky, chilling whisper of a voice made the attackers falter.

One thug fell under an unbelievable impact from the fist of a man so small. A second thug began to sneak away. The other two stood their ground for a moment. It is doubtful that they liked their predicament. They knew the reputation of The Whisperer.

The menacing figure of the underworld had come back to the city when many things were happening; things that baffled the police. The Whisperer had let it be known that he had returned. He knew that information might force action from the crooks behind the air-mail murders. Action that might betray them.

The Whisperer knew that Police Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon had been stumped by the air-mail murders. They had begun while Wildcat was investigating the insistent rumor of a gigantic smuggling plot to bring in drugs from the Far East.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

The air-mail murders put the quest very much in the shade. Men of money had been kidnaped. There had been demands for ransom. Then, just as the mail plane roared overhead, the bodies of the missing men would plummet to earth. Each had borne tags with air-mail stamps, addressed to Commissioner Gordon.

One wealthy realtor, George Halbird, was still missing. He had disappeared a week before. Halbird, like the others, was supposed to be wealthy. Sharp, perhaps shady deals, had helped to make his fortune. But now, his bank account was empty.

Perhaps The Whisperer was thinking of that as he drove hard, compact fists home. Whatever he was thinking, he was rudely interrupted. A siren cut the dark air. The shrill blast of a police whistle followed it. A police emergency truck roared up, floodlights blazing. The dingy shipyard area was suddenly bathed in light.

Uniformed figures poured from the truck. An unpleasant, nasal voice shrieked orders.

"The Whisperer!" it squawked. "Get him first! Blast him on the spot! You'll all get promotions!"

The cops swarmed over The Whisperer. They seemed reluctant to kill him. They no doubt knew that the mysterious figure often solved crimes for them that the department was unable to cope with. But the nasal-voiced commander hopped up and down in rage.

He was a long-nosed, fish-mouthed individual. His title was Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton.

Bolton had two all-consuming ambitions. One was to replace Wildcat Gordon as police commissioner. The other was to sneer at The Whisperer from the outside of a good stout cell. Bolton particularly resented The Whisperer's solution of crimes that baffled himself.

He was spectacularly unsuccessful in both of his ambitions.

Four husky cops held The Whisperer. It seemed that Bolton had succeeded at last. But the cops suddenly felt they had seized an eel.

The slight, wiry figure twisted. Two cops fell sprawling. A pair of queer-looking guns leaped into the hands of The Whisperer. There came a sound as if imprisoned air had rushed from high-compression tanks.

The Whisperer did not shoot at the cops, nor even at the angry, dancing Bolton. It was another target: The floodlights on the emergency truck went out with a crash of glass. The Whisperer slipped his supersilenced pistols into special pockets. He bent low and ran, weaving like a broken-field runner on the gridiron.

The Whisperer had to get away fast. He was not afraid of conflict. But he did not want Bolton to realize both of his ambitions in a single stroke. For The Whisperer was Wildcat Gordon, police commissioner.

His peculiarly efficient methods of stamping out crime would not have met with the approval of his superiors. Not even if that group did term itself the reform political party.

Red stabs of flame suddenly cut the night ahead of the fleeing Whisperer. A gun roared half a dozen times. Lead tore through his drab gray clothing. The shots did not come from the direction of the cops. They came from the direction of the Paradise Aquatique.

The Whisperer hurled himself to the ground. He rolled, slid to his feet again and raced in a different direction. He was so silent that the gunner did not hear his footsteps.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

The Whisperer collided with the gunman with an exclamation of surprise. The "gunman" was a girl! The impact knocked the breath from her. She was momentarily stunned.

A quick flick of a pencil flashlight showed The Whisperer that she was far too pretty to be out at night in such surroundings. And it showed him that she was Dianne Le Mere, chief hostess for F. Raymond Carleton, owner of the Paradise Aquatique.

The Whisperer's eyes glittered strangely. He tore on through the night before the girl had a chance to recover. It had occurred to him that the Paradise Aquatique would have made an ideal smuggling depot. It was beached on the water front, and had a labyrinth of passages and compartments that would make excellent caches for smuggled drugs.

The only thing about the drug plot that had baffled The Whisperer was that he knew no drugs had actually been smuggled into the city. His underworld sources of information would have tipped him off to that.

They had told him, just that day, that the first big shipment was due in a mere matter of hours. And The Whisperer was convinced that there was a connection between the drug plot and the air-mail murders!

The gray figure reached a parked coupe. The car was as drab as he was. Even before he stepped inside, his hands were moving. A quick motion and the powdery-white hair became a reddish hue. One hand went to his mouth, and The Whisperer's oddly pointed chin vanished. The chin became as square and hard as a chip of granite.

The round-brimmed hat disappeared. Even the gray clothes became a loudly checked suit, as he squirmed into the seat of the car. Gray spats were replaced by a pair of vivid yellow shoes. A bright red carnation glowed in his coat lapel like a stop light.

"Dammitall, Wildcat," a heavy voice boomed from beside him, "I don't like this a bit! You almost got nabbed back there. I wish I'd never made those dental plates!"

The gaunt man beside Wildcat Gordon was bald, except for two gray tufts of hair over his ears. He squinted at Wildcat nearsightedly. Actually, retired Deputy Richard Traeger, better known as old "Quick Trigger," saw a lot more than he was given credit for.

A master at disguise, he had made the queer dental plates that transformed Wildcat Gordon into The Whisperer. He was the only man alive who knew that the two personalities were the same. Wildcat regarded him almost as a father.

Wildcat's natural voice clipped sharp orders.

"I'm going back, Quick," he rapped. "You leave the car here and scout around on foot, and rush anybody who looks suspicious. Take them to headquarters. That includes the girl!"

Wildcat slammed the door of the coupe and disappeared from sight. Deputy Bolton had repaired the lights of the emergency truck when Wildcat strode up to the excited group of cops. Bolton's small, fishlike mouth twisted open as he recognized his chief.

Wildcat's colorless, Texas eyes glinted from beneath the brim of an army campaigns hat, as he surveyed his deputy.

"Henry," he snapped, "I specifically told you to stay at headquarters! What's going on here?"

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

Bolton gulped. "The Whisperer!" he spluttered "We got a tip that—"

"When you have orders from me, follow them!" Wildcat clipped. "You're interfering with my investigation of a smuggling case!"

A large man who had not emerged from the truck struggled to the ground. He had a thick mane of black hair and a foreign-looking spade beard that hid whatever his face might really have looked like.

"This is at my suggestion, Commissioner Gordon," the newcomer announced in an authoritative tone. "While you are spending all your time on some minor smuggling case, men have been murdered! I have been informed that I am the next to go!"

Wildcat knew the man. He was Doctor Josef Scalzi, owner of a private sanitarium on a rocklike island in the middle of the wide West River that skirted the city. Wildcat had searched Scalzi's sanitarium when he first heard the rumors of the dope-smuggling ring. But he had found nothing.

Scalzi flourished two letters under Wildcat's nose. Both were typewritten, and were brief.

"You had better get cash on hand," the first read. "Victims who do not have cash are air mailed to Wildcat Gordon—dead! You are next!"

The second was a warning.

"You are on the spot," it informed the doctor. "If you clear out with what money you can salvage, you will escape certain death. This is a sincere warning to save you. Take in that manner. A friend."

The letters bore different postmarks.

Scalzi seemed about to explode into fragments as Wildcat read. His spade beard quivered.

"I'll not leave!" he screamed. "I demand protection!"

Wildcat's eyes were hard as he looked from the letters to the bearded doctor. It occurred to him that culprits in a plot not infrequently write threatening letters to themselves. It gives them a reason to work closely with the police, keep tabs on what is going on. But Wildcat also thought of something else.

The emergency truck, at Wildcat's order, started to return to headquarters. Half a dozen blocks away, the noise of a plane's motor droned through the air. It was the first night-mail plane.

Instinctively, Wildcat and Scalzi looked up at the running lights of the ship. Soon it was directly overhead.

The cop driving the truck was the first to cry out. He jammed on the brakes, nearly hurling the occupants from the truck. A body swished through the air, thudded to the pavement. Wildcat Gordon leaped to the street.

The body was the crushed remnant of what had been a man.

Around the neck was tied an address tag. It bore air-mail stamps and was addressed to Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. Scalzi paled, as Wildcat stooped to read the inscription. It was the same as those on the bodies of other men who had been kidnaped.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

"This is George Halbird," it read. "It is unfortunate that he had no ready cash. The next victim would be wise to supply himself when he gets his initial warning."

Scalzi's spade beard quivered.

"I-I'm next," he faltered. "A-and I haven't got much cash!"

Wildcat Gordon looked hard at Scalzi for a moment. Then he whirled on one heel.

"Go back to headquarters," he snapped. "I've got a job to do!"

Wildcat hailed a cab and went back to where he had parked his coupe. He climbed into it and drove to one of the most disreputable parts of the city. There, he had a room where he was known only as D. Smith, the wispy, gray figure who was The Whisperer. He was sure the air line companies were not involved in the murders. He had checked on them thoroughly. He was also reasonably sure the air-mail murder victims had not been warned before they had been kidnaped.

None had asked for police protection. None but Scalzi. And Wildcat Gordon thought that deviation from criminal routine was peculiar. There had to be a reason.

Another thing he knew was, that within a few weeks of each kidnaping and murder, the victims had drawn large sums of cash from their bank accounts. There was something screwy some place. And The Whisperer intended to learn just what made it so.

Wildcat raced up narrow, dimly lighted stairs to his secret room. He became again The Whisperer. The oddly pointed chin, the blurry gray hair were there. But The Whisperer this time was stouter. His shoulders seemed to have grown. He was almost top-heavy. He strode to a phone booth and called headquarters. He removed the dental plates as he did so, and asked for Quick Trigger in the clipped tones of Wildcat Gordon.

"Let her go," he instructed. "I'll pick her up. Don't let her know she will be followed."

He hung up and replaced the dental plates. Then he drove toward the river. He parked near a shabby shack directly opposite the towering island that held Doctor Josef Scalzi's sanitarium.

Inside the shack, there was a variety of apparatus. A telescope was focused on the island. So was an automatic moving picture camera. Another camera bathed the river with infra-red light, invisible to the naked eye.

The Whisperer first looked through his specially constructed telescope. The island loomed, a high, rocky upthrust. Years ago, before water had been piped to the city from the mountains, the island held a reservoir. It was rocky, and inaccessible except from one landing platform. The Whisperer knew that no boat could land at any other point than that.

The continuous film, behind an infra-red filter, gave him a complete picture of what came and went from that point. Swiftly, he examined the film, which had been automatically developed in a tank below the camera. It showed nothing except the comings and goings of Scalzi and his chief assistant.

The assistant was an ugly looking fellow. He had a wart on his nose almost as large as the nose itself. His name was Milus Krug.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

The film had been running continuously for several days. The Whisperer had examined it each day. It had showed no departures nor arrivals from the island except those of Scalzi and his assistant.

The Whisperer was absorbed in concentration. The blow that struck him on the head came without warning. Whoever struck it had been smart enough to disconnect the wire alarm that This Whisperer had constructed around the shack. He must have been there when The Whisperer arrived.

The Whisperer whirled, half conscious. The blackjack struck again. Power ebbed from the motor nerves of the gray man. He was dimly conscious of what was going on, but was powerless to prevent it.

A heavy man, his back turned, struck a match. He emptied a can of kerosene and lighted it. The shack blazed with a sudden flame, filled with soot-black smoke. The intruder raced out of the door.

Flames ate up the wooden flooring, leaped to the tables and chairs. The room became an inferno. The Whisperer could not move his arms or legs. He managed to roll over the floor. He pressed against a hidden lever in the planking.

A large section gave way, plummeted him into a black pit below. Equipment in the room tumbled after him, crashed into a tangled heap.

The trap closed above him. The flame and smoke, going upward, did not penetrate into the pit below. Slowly, strength came back to The Whisperer. He flicked on his flashlight and examined the wreckage. One piece he picked up.

It was a square mirror, now cracked in two. It was strangely thick for a mirror. An outdoor advertising man might have recognized it as the type of wired mirror used to sell merchandise.

It was based on the tendency of men and women to look into a mirror, if one is handy. The proximity of the human body, charged with electricity as it is, sets up an interference with a current. In the advertising mirrors, that interruption starts a talking machine record with a sales message. In The Whisperer's, it clicked a camera that took a picture.

The Whisperer whipped out the plate and looked at the film. He saw the large wart on the nose of Milus Krug, chief assistant of Doctor Josef Scalzi!

In that instant, The Whisperer saw a great many things not on the film. He thought of something he should have suspected from the beginning. He opened a sliding door in the side of the pitlike cellar and raced through a corridor. He emerged on the ground, leaped into his drab coupe.

The little car whirled through the streets at top speed. The Whisperer did not go to the dock that gave onto the river. There, he could have gotten a boat and rowed to the island. Instead, he went to the highway over the mud flats that led to F. Raymond Carleton's Paradise Aquatique.

The Whisperer did not see the wart on the nose of the man driving the car that followed him. The Whisperer was in a hurry. He might have made more of what he now suspected, if he had time to wait. The city records might have given him definite information. But he thought more murder was on the way, and soon. He also thought it probable that one of the next victims would be The Whisperer. There was no time to spare.

Half a mile away, The Whisperer parked his car. Silently, he crept toward the towering hulk that was the Paradise Aquatique. He moved quietly, unseen, up the glorified gangway that served as an entrance. A husky doorman stood there.



## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

The Whisperer stopped, unscrewed a light bulb from the line that decorated the gangway. He hurled it with a quick motion.

The doorman didn't see it fly past him. He heard it as it crashed into the bulk-head on the other side of the ship. He raced over to find out what had made the noise. That was why he didn't see The Whisperer slide quickly into a companionway leading aft.

Just as The Whisperer disappeared from sight, a tall, gaunt individual strode up from the remade dining saloon that served as a night club.

If the newcomer had been any thinner, he probably would have been called a human toothpick. He scarcely cast a shadow, as it was. But the hands were huge, gnarled and scarred. F. Raymond Carleton had fought his way to riches in the night-club racket by methods that were more than direct.

He walked catlike now, to the spot where the light bulb had crashed against the bulkhead. Then he whirled quickly, a hard glitter coming to his eyes.

The Whisperer did not see that. It probably would not have made any difference to his plans, if he had. He trod silently down stairways, through steel doors, into what had been the engine room of the ship. The engines were gone now. They had been sold as junk.

The pale light of his flash showed the old engine room was empty. The Whisperer went through another door into the boiler room. He grunted with satisfaction at what he found. Half a dozen large cans stood at one side of the room.

He opened the lids, found them filled with black blasting powder. He knew now that his suspicion was well founded. He felt sure of the secret of the air-mail murders!

Two things happened quickly as The Whisperer made that decision. He turned his lights slowly. A girl's scream cut through his thoughts. Diane Le Mere, the pleasure boat hostess, stood directly in the path of the flashlight.

Her face was contorted in sudden fear. She was not looking at The Whisperer. She was looking behind him. She screamed again, and fled through the space between the ancient boilers.

The Whisperer acted as though he had not seen her. He flicked off the flashlight, walked slowly ahead into the darkness. He lighted a cigarette carelessly, dropped the match to the floor. As it flickered out, a hoarse chuckle sounded behind him. Then lights flashed on in the boiler room.

The Whisperer turned, and saw the four thugs who had attacked him earlier in the night. One cradled a Tommy gun under his arm. He raised it slowly.

"Stick 'em up, wise guy!" he rasped. "We got you right, this time!"

The Whisperer shrugged his queerly broad shoulders, began to raise his hands. He glanced once above him. Then his right hand moved swiftly. He whipped the cigarette from his lips, flicked it unerringly toward the side of the old boiler room. It landed squarely in the center of an opened can of blasting powder.

Whoom!

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

The detonation made the old hulk shudder from stem to stern. The mobsters screamed in pain and terror. The terrific blast in the confines of the boiler room was like a shell explosion in the breech of a cannon.

The Whisperer leaped upward as the blast boomed fourth. He had been standing directly under a boiler room ventilator that led to the deck above. The force of the explosion shot him upward like a projectile. His body slammed against the turned lip of the shaft, and he tumbled out on the deck.

The Whisperer was stunned. He struggled to his feet, looked about him. He saw the trim figure of Diane Le Mere racing along the deck. Behind her, a larger figure drifted. It looked familiar. The Whisperer strained his eyes, but the gloom prevented recognition.

The man in gray went quickly to the rooms that had been the captain's quarters. It was now Carleton's office. The Whisperer made a quick phone call, then rifled through some papers and tore back on deck.

He went in the direction taken by Diane Le Mere, found a hatchway leading to the after hold. The Whisperer smiled grimly, as he climbed down into the darkness.

In the bowels of the ship, he heard a door clang. Then he found the door. It led to the disused shaft alley leading from the engine room to the propeller. Diane Le Mere was leading him to the thing he sought.

At the end of the shaft alley, he found another hatchway. It was newer than the others, had been built after the liner had been beached on the mud flats.

The Whisperer climbed down a ladder. He went through a shaft that had been blasted out of solid rock. It terminated in a great iron pipe. The pipe was so large a tall man could stand erect without any trouble.

The Whisperer knew then that he was in a water tunnel that had supplied the city when Doctor Josef Scalzi's island had been a reservoir, before water had been piped down from the mountains. The obsolete maps of the city's water system would have shown where that water tunnel could be found.

The Whisperer knew, as he raced along, that the smuggling ring was about to begin operations. He was sure his underworld tip on that had been correct. And he knew now that two more air-mail murders were about to be carried out. Perhaps three if the gang could catch The Whisperer.

The gray figure emerged in a windy darkness. He knew every foot of the rocky island. He thought he had searched it thoroughly. The sanitarium itself was separated from the rest of the towering rock. The Whisperer did not go to the sanitarium. He skirted a rocky promontory on the side of the island toward the city.

The dim outline of a pile of cut stone showed in the gloom. Wildcat Gordon had seen it in daylight. Buried in a tangle of weeds and underbrush, it looked as if some one had started some kind of structure and had abandoned it. A long pole lay beside it.

A hoarse whistle burst involuntarily from the lips of The Whisperer. He saw several men working frantically at the structure. And he saw what had been going on. But that whispering whistle gave the mobsters warning.

Two men plunged onto the back of The Whisperer with angry curses. The gray figure went down. But he squirmed, shot out steel-hard fists. The two thugs were no match for the knuckles of the Whisperer.

The gray man freed himself, ran low over the rocky ground. He was almost invisible in the darkness. As he ran, he tripped over a struggling form.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

He scooped that form up as if it had been a child's rag doll. If it was Diane Le Mere. She was bound and gagged. Wild fear showed in her dark eyes. The Whisperer's quick fingers untied her.

"Run!" he clipped. "The south side of the island! It is a long drop—but the water is deep! We may make it!"

The girl panted in terror. She didn't ask any questions. The hoarse shouts of angry men welled up behind them. Diane Le Mere raced ahead of The Whisperer. They took the only path leading to the south side of the island. A rasping laugh crawled from the throat of one of their pursuers.

The girl suddenly screamed. She tripped, disappeared entirely from sight. The Whisperer was going too fast to stop. The wire stretched across the path tripped him as it had tripped the girl. He felt himself falling into a pit of blackness. He had a dim, brief glimpse of the girl, unconscious at the bottom of a rock-strewn pit.

Then consciousness left The Whisperer.

The first thing The Whisperer noticed when he regained consciousness was a tag around his neck. If it was addressed, he knew, to Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. The gray man's hands and feet were bound.

Near by, The Whisperer saw a long pole as large in girth as a tree trunk. The pole protruded at an odd angle from the pile of rocks that had taken on a new meaning to The Whisperer.

The thing was a huge catapult. It was built so that it could be taken apart or assembled quickly. It was powerful enough to hurl a man's body through the air and across the half of the river that lay between the island and the city.

A booming voice made The Whisperer jerk erect.

"Dammitall, Wildcat'll get this Scalzi guy for this!" the big voice of Quick Trigger snorted. "You can't get away with this! Wildcat left orders—"

The Whisperer twisted. He knew now who that familiar-looking figure had been, trailing Diane Le Mere on the deck of the night club liner. He saw old Quick Trigger bound as securely as himself. He knew the gaunt man was bluffing, gambling for time. A harsh voice answered the retired deputy.

"Cops cannot get here," the voice rasped. "The iron door is barred, even if they did find the tunnel. All three of you will die!"

Quick Trigger snorted again. He cast an anxious glance at The Whisperer.

"I tell you, Wildcat'll get you," Quick Trigger insisted. "You might get a break if you turned The Whisperer over to him. Even Bolton would go easy on you for doing that. It doesn't matter what you do to me."

Quick Trigger was desperate. He was trying to talk the killers into sparing the life of The Whisperer. Even if it unmasked Wildcat Gordon, it would at least save his life.

The killer in charge of operations snarled at Quick Trigger. He seemed a big man. A black mask entirely concealed his features. A flowing black robe completely covered his body.

"I shall turn The Whisperer over to Wildcat Gordon," he sneered. "But The Whisperer will be very dead! You shall go first. Then The Whisperer. The girl will be the last. The air mail will do big business, this night!"

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

He laughed harshly. The Whisperer noticed then that Diane Le Mere was lying, bound, near old Quick Trigger. Her face was a set mask. She was fighting against the fear of the death she faced. The Whisperer's chilling voice cut the night.

"If you are wise, my friend," his husky tones rasped, "you will dispose of The Whisperer first. He has escaped even more astute criminals than you. You can wait for the next air mail for the rest."

The masked man whirled. His face could not be seen. But there was indecision in his movements. He glanced at a wrist watch.

"There will be no next air mail." he shrilled. "All three of you will go with this one! But you are right! You shall be the first to go!"

The masked man made a quick gesture with one hand. Wart-nosed Milus Krug seized the helpless form of The Whisperer, roped him lightly to the end of the catapult.

The Whisperer caught a glance at the mechanism of the death machine. It was a complicated combination of springs and weights. But, at the most, it would take a dozen minutes to set it for the second victim to be hurled into eternity. The Whisperer's strategy in being the first to go would not give Quick Trigger much time to figure out a way to save himself.

Tears streamed down the face of the old deputy. He started to speak. "Wi-Wi—" he began. Then he clamped his mouth shut. Even with death before him and Wildcat, Quick Trigger kept his promise. He would not reveal that his protegee was The Whisperer.

The masked leader grew impatient. He glanced again at his watch. Faintly, the drone of an airplane motor sounded in the air.

"She back-tracks on the same course, taking off," he rasped. "That will be ten minutes between the first and second. We'll have to make it snappy!"

The motor droned louder. The landing lights showed red and green dots in the sky. The masked leader waved his hand. There was a sharp whish as the catapult released. The body of The Whisperer shot hundreds of feet into the dark air of the night.

Quick Trigger groaned and turned his face to the ground. He was thinking of the broken bodies of the other victims of the air-mail murders.

Quick Trigger was tied to the catapult when all hell broke loose, a few minutes later. He was thinking that if he had never made those dental plates, Wildcat would not have gotten into this mess. If he had not been The Whisperer, Wildcat probably would have gone to the Paradise Aquatique with a suitable squad of cops.

Quick Trigger didn't get very far in his thinking. There was a crashing roar from the end of the island as high explosive ripped apart the barred door of the water tunnel. Then the sulphurous tones of Wildcat Gordon ripped into the night!

"Round up every man on the island!" Wildcat roared. "Shoot to kill if anybody resists! We're playing this one for keeps!"

Quick Trigger's mouth dropped open with an expression as blank as a ventriloquist's dummy. The island suddenly swarmed with cops. Leading them was the bristling figure of Wildcat Gordon.

## THE AIR-MAIL MURDERS

Guns roared and spikes of flame bit into the night. Mobsters dropped, through permanently with any crime they might have planned.

Milus Krug moved nervously toward the lever of the catapult. He seemed too dazed to realize he was acting under the eyes of the police commissioner. Wildcat's Police Positive roared and a hole leaped into Krug's forehead.

A knife flashed in Wildcat's hand. It zipped through the air, quivered as it smacked into the wooden pole of the catapult. The light rope that bound Quick Trigger parted beneath the blade. The old deputy slid from the pole as Krug slumped against the lever. The catapult pole leaped into the air, but Quick Trigger was not aboard. "Hellamighty. Wildcat, what—" Wildcat Gordon was busy. He leaped upon the masked leader, tore the mask from him. It was F. Raymond Carleton. The flowing black robe he wore hid the thinness of his body. He would have been recognized anywhere without it.

Wildcat released the girl. Then he whirled on Carleton. "Where is Scalzi?" he rapped. Carleton opened his mouth. But he didn't get a chance to reply. Two uniformed cops pushed a grimy, wild-eyed figure before them. It was Doctor Josef Scalzi.

"I know all about it now!" Scalzi screamed. "They want this island as part of a smuggling plot! They tried to scare me into fleeing. It was worth millions to them! Krug offered to buy me out. But I wouldn't scare, so they were going to kill me and destroy the body. They could say I ran away."

"I know," Wildcat Gordon said, evenly. "And they killed the first few men they got to put up cash to finance the smuggling. They used a phony kidnaping racket to keep them from talking when the gang kept the money for themselves. It threw the police off the real reason for the kidnaping. That explains the withdrawal of large amounts of cash from the bank accounts of the victims before they were kidnaped.

"I suspected you were in it, at first, Scalzi. But if you had written those two letters to yourself with the intention of turning them over to me, you would not have been fool enough to use the same typewriter for both of them. Particularly, your own typewriter. I have a memory for typewriter peculiarities. They are easier than finger prints."

Wildcat paused for a moment, looked at the dead body of Milus Krug. "Apparently Krug was that big a fool, though," he concluded. "But he didn't know I would get both of those letters." Diane Le Mere edged up to Wildcat as he directed twinkling eyes at old Quick Trigger.

"How did you get here. Quick?" Wildcat demanded. There was amusement in his eyes. Old Quick looked at the ground for a moment. He gulped. "I—I followed The Whisperer to the ship," he lied, lamely.

Diane Le Mere looked at Wildcat. There were tears in her eyes.

"We owe him our lives," she said, slowly. "I am a Federal narcotic agent and was investigating a drug-running tip. These policemen tell me they were at the ship when you arrived, that The Whisperer telephoned who I was and where I had gone. And now he's—" She broke off with a sob.

Wildcat smiled. He did not tell her that The Whisperer's queerly padded shoulders had concealed a specially constructed parachute. Even with his hands bound, he had been able to pull the rip cord. He had landed near the shore of the river and gotten to the old ship almost as soon as the cops.

Nor would he tell old Quick Trigger until that worthy's curiosity threatened to wreck his arteries.