

IS BRAINS BENTON THE INSPIRATION FOR THE THREE INVESTIGATORS?

Following is a study I posted on the Brains Benton website on 1/5/04. I'm a fan of both the Brains Benton and The Three Investigators series, having read both, but I prefer the BB series. I'll leave it to you to decide whether my preference colors my conclusions. But I've tried to be objective. Whatever the case may be, all good ideas come from somewhere, and I'm sure BB, too, is built on a body of previous works (beginning with Holmes and Watson). That said, here is the post:

• INTRODUCTION

Back in the mid-1960s, I happened upon a series of mystery books that made me sit up and take notice. The main characters, boys in their young teens, had formed a real business, a detective agency. The headquarters of the detective agency was hidden from the prying eyes of adults. Entrance to headquarters could be made by pushing on a specific spot on a certain board, causing a secret doorway to open. Upon entering headquarters through the secret entrance, the junior partner typically encountered the brains of the agency sitting behind his desk, deep in thought, his thinking apparatus in high gear. The inside of their headquarters was a combination office, laboratory, workshop, and photographic darkroom.

The leader of the outfit had constructed most of the equipment himself from junk he had scrounged. He earned whatever money he needed by repairing broken items. Even the agency's business card had been produced on a printing press that he had assembled. The brains of the detective agency, a boy-genius of unusual name and appearance, did almost all the planning and deductive reasoning.

Whenever he found it necessary to throw adults off the track, however, he had the ability to appear rather stupid.

His partner, an average guy, and an athletic type did most of the legwork for the agency. Whenever they were on a case, they addressed each other by their code names. The junior partner typically wanted to drop a case whenever danger was involved. The leader, however, had a stubborn streak. He usually ignored such remarks in the same way that he overlooked stupid questions from his partner. But whenever the boys did argue about a course of action, the junior partner always surrendered. After all, he couldn't let his friend face danger alone, could he?

The detectives met many colorful people during their adventures. One of the most memorable was a rather stuffy, but otherwise likable, British chauffeur who drove a magnificent gold-trimmed Rolls-Royce that had originally been customized for an Arabian sheik.

Another memorable character, although much less likable, was a boy their age, a goofy-acting, skinny guy who was always nosing into the detective agency's business. The young detectives did their best to avoid him.

I vividly remember reading the first book in the series. Here's how it opened: The head of the agency sent the junior partner an odd-sounding message that contained a hidden meaning known only to them both. An amusing episode ensued when the junior partner's mother intercepted the message. But the boy managed to get away from his mother and rushed to headquarters.

I won't reveal the rest of the plot in detail. It's enough to say that at one point a quick-change artist donned more than one costume to frighten the young detectives away from an old house that was rumored to be haunted. According to local legend, no one had been able to stay in that house for any length of time.

True to his stubborn nature, the head of the agency felt determined to investigate the house, even if his partner did not want to go there. As always, the brains of the agency won the disagreement and off the young detectives went, loaded down with a camera and a portable tape recorder.

Another adventure involved a foreign boy from across the sea who was the rightful owner of a piece of valuable jewelry hidden inside an elusive plaster statue. The young detectives helped him to recover his item, but first they had to unravel one secret message that led only to a second coded message. The case was eventually solved, but not before an adult tried to snatch the plaster statue from the hands of the leader of the detective agency. When that happened, the statue fell, breaking into pieces. Inside was the sought-after jewelry!

Each case in the series contained many memorable scenes. In one episode, the boy detectives dressed up a dummy to fool someone into believing the dummy was alive. I'll bet you know what series I'm talking about. If you said the **Brains Benton** mysteries, you're right! But if you said The **Three Investigators** series, you'd still be right! It is my theory that the latter is in large part derived from the former.

That is what I believed when, as a boy, I read the first few Three Investigators books. I felt like I'd read it all before in the Brains Benton series. As Jimmy Carson in the BB series said, *"Right in front of me a footprint suddenly appeared—a glowing, shimmering footprint! Then another one, and another! It was like watching a ghost walk!"*

What follows is my breakdown of certain parallels between the two series that appear to me to be too coincidental. Ranging from basic concepts to specific language, the Three Investigators stories echo vital elements found in the Brains Benton series.

I have compared only the first and seventh books in the 3I series. But the first book in the Three Investigators series is especially important since it defines the series. Whatever characteristics

may have been winnowed out later (although I'm not aware of any that were), the first book in the series set the pace.

I recognize that both series contain elements common to the whole children's mystery genre, such as club houses, code words, allegedly haunted houses, etc. Each point of comparison might possibly be argued on its own merits. However, the corpus of evidence seems to present a strong case for my theory that Brains Benton was a major inspiration in the birth of the Three Investigators. One can only form a true opinion by reading the following comparisons word for word. I leave it to the jury, as I must, to judge the strength of my case.

Throughout this article, the following books are referenced: *Terror Castle* [TC], *Missing Message* [MM], *Fiery Eye* [FE], *Roving Rolls* [RR], *Counterfeit Coin* [CC], *Waltzing Mouse* [WM], *Stolen Dummy* [SD], *Painted Dragon* [PD].

• THE BASICS

The "Basics" means the foundational concept and appeal of the stories.

COPYRIGHT: Only three years between the two series.

Brains Benton's last case: Copyright 1961. Three Investigators' first case: Copyright 1964.

MOTHER INTERCEPTS MESSAGE FROM LEADER: At times, the Junior Partner is summoned to Headquarters by a coded message from the Leader:

BB: "Do you remember that crazy person who phoned here once before," Mom said. "Well, it must have been the same party because he said the same thing again, 'The kangaroos have escaped.'" I fell back on my pillow. Oh, no—not another secret message from X! [MM, p.187]

T3I: "Your friend Jupiter called." His mother went on rolling out the dough on a board. "He left a message for you." "A message?" Bob yelled with sudden excitement. "What was it?" "Here's the message," she said. "It says, 'Green Gate One. The presses are rolling.'" [TC, pp.3, 5]

BUT MOTHER SOMETIMES JOKES ABOUT THE SECRET MESSAGES: The Junior Partner's mother begins to catch on:

BB: I was at the door when she called, "Use lots of soap." I turned. She had a big smile on her face and a wise twinkle in her eye. Couldn't fool her. She knew that alligator bathing business was a message for me. [RR, p. 12]

T3I: Bob frowned. That wasn't part of the message code Jupiter had worked out. Then he saw his mother smiling and realized she was joking with him. "Aw, Mom!" he said. "What was it really?" "Now that I think harder," his mother told him, "It was 'Rustle and bustle, this is the score. Somebody's needed to mind the store.'" [FE, p.96-97]

SECRET ENTRANCE TO HEADQUARTERS: The secretive method of entering Headquarters is a very appealing element of the stories:

BB: Instead, I went along an alley that ran behind the property. When I reached the garage, I got off my bike and pushed through the thick bushes until I was facing the north side of the building. Then making doubly sure that I hadn't been seen, I pressed the third nail in the fourth board from the bottom. Suddenly a section of the garage wall slid open in front of me. I ducked through and the panel slipped back into place. There were work benches and tables and power tools and scientific apparatus. [MM, pp.12-13]

T3I: Bob rode past the front gate. He went on almost a hundred yards farther and stopped near the corner. Bob dismounted and found the two green boards Jupe had made into a private gate. That was Green Gate One. He pushed against the eye of a fish that was looking out of the water at the sinking ship, and the boards swung up. He shoved his bike through and closed the gate. Now he was inside the junkyard, in the corner which Jupiter had arranged as his outdoor workshop [TC, p.7]

INSIDE HEADQUARTERS / LABORATORY: The headquarters is a wonderland of tools, electronics, and laboratory equipment:

BB: What a place! It looked like a cross between a machine shop, a research laboratory, and the inside of a spaceship. There were shelves crowded with transformers, resistors, amplifiers, and almost every other kind of electronic equipment. You could look around and see enough power tools to run a small factory. Along the walls were racks of test-tubes, vials, and bottles. A small printing press, a telescope, a tape recorder—you name it, Brains had it! [MM, p.13]

T3I: And no one but the boys themselves knew that they had equipped the now well-hidden trailer as an office, laboratory, and photographic darkroom, with several hidden entrances [TC, p.27]. Jupiter had a workshop section, fitted with various tools and a printing press. Inside Headquarters was a tiny office equipped with a desk, telephone, tape recorder, filing cabinet and other necessities, and next to it was an equally small laboratory and a darkroom for developing pictures. [FE, p.5-6]

BB: Chrome-plated machine on rollers. An automatic film-developer and printer. Brains had built it out of surplus photographic equipment and old electrical parts. I'd seen him put it together. Whew! He had everything in there—from a heating element from an old broiler to an old motor for a vacuum cleaner. But it worked like a charm. You put the film negative into a slot at one end, added chemicals and developers, and in about half an hour the finished prints popped out of the other end. [CC, p.24]

ENCOUNTERING THE LEADER IN HIS WORKSHOP: The Leader, the brains, is an imposing sight:

BB: [Brains] was seated in a chair in what he called his "inner sanctum." He had on a long white coat, the kind scientists wear, and his fingers were pressed tightly together to make a church steeple. He gazed at me over them. [MM, p.13]

Brains parked himself in his “thinking chair” and thought. [SD, p.55]

T3I: Jupiter Jones was sitting in an old swivel chair, pinching his lower lip, always a sign that his mental machinery was spinning in high gear. [TC, p.7]

ROLES IN THE PARTNERSHIP: The roles are defined. The Leader solves the mysteries, while the Junior Partner gathers evidence. The leader accompanies the Junior Partner in most cases:

BB: The partnership worked out fine. Brains did most of the thinking. And I did most of the doing, like shadowing people and collecting fingerprints. [MM, p.15]

To tell the truth, Brains deserves most of the credit for solving those mysteries. He’s the President and big wheel of Benton and Carson and does all the masterminding. Me? I’m James MacDonald Carson, Secretary-Treasurer of the agency and its general odd-job man. I do the legwork, like getting fingerprints, shadowing suspects, and rounding up evidence. [PD, p.10]

T3I: [Jupiter said,] “As First Investigator, I will be in charge of planning. As Second Investigator, Pete will be in charge of all operations requiring athletic prowess. Bob, you will handle all of the research our cases may need. You will also keep complete records of everything we do.” [TC, p.9]

BB: Brains is always giving me tough jobs, and sometimes they’re dangerous, too. [WM, p.95]

T3I: [Jupiter says,] “The two of you must proceed to explore Terror Castle without me, while I lie here and ponder the different mysteries with which we are confronted.” [TC, p.96]

CODE NAMES FOR DETECTIVES:

BB: You see, whenever we are really working on a case, we use code names. I’m Operative Three. Brains is X. There is no Operative Two. [PD, p.15]

T3I: Jupiter is “First,” “Okay, First.” [FE, p.136]. Pete is “Second,” and Bob is “Records.” “Come on, Second and Records.” [FE, p.17]

THE AGENCY’S BUSINESS CARD: This is one of the unique aspects of the detective business, separating it from “adventure clubs” in other series stories:

THE BENTON AND CARSON INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE AGENCY

Confidential Investigators and Criminologists. Modern scientific methods and devices used.
SHADOWING, TRACING OF MISSING PERSONS, FREE CONSULTATION, 24-HOUR SERVICE

President: Barclay “Brains” Benton, Secretary-Treasurer: James “Jimmy” Carson

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS “We Investigate Anything”

???

First Investigator—Jupiter Jones, Second Investigator—Peter Crenshaw, Records and Research—Bob Andrews

LEADER RIGGED UP PRINTING PRESS:

BB: Brains had printed them [business cards] himself on the press he'd rigged up. [MM, p.48]

You should see that card. You see, I helped Brains turn it out on that printing press he'd assembled up in the secret laboratory. [PD, p.55]

T3I: Pete Crenshaw was busy at the small printing press which had come in as junk, and which Jupiter had labored over until it would operate again. Pete shut off the press and handed him one of the cards he had been printing. It was a large business card. [TC, pp.7-8]

LEADER REBUILDS EQUIPMENT FROM JUNK:

BB: (Brains) made most of the things himself from junk he scrounged from garages and tool shops and even from the town dump. [MM, p.14]

T3I: (All the equipment in Headquarters had been rebuilt from junk.) [TC, p.27]. Almost all the equipment had come into the salvage yard as junk but had been rebuilt by Jupiter and the other boys. [FE, p.6]

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS: Notice the similarities in description:

BB: a buzzer on Brains' desk rasped into life. It was a signal that someone in the Benton house was calling over the private telephone line that Brains had rigged. [SD, p.142]

T3I: "One moment, please," said a young woman's voice, which they could all hear through the loudspeaker attachment that Jupiter had rigged up. [FE, p.9] Jupiter reached for a microphone on the desk. It was wired to a small loudspeaker in the office. He had arranged this method of answering when his aunt or uncle called him. [FE, p.51]

BB: Over on Brains' desk a red light was flashing off and on. "The burglar alarm," he hissed. [CC, p.171]

T3I: At that moment, a red light, mounted on a board over their printing press, began to blink. [FE, p.8]

INVENTIONS: Notice the similarity in description:

BB: Right now, he was examining something that looked to me like a vacuum cleaner. It had a long wire coming out of one end with a round metal disc on it, and a pair of earphones was attached to the other end. "...an underwater metal detector." [WM, pp.26, 92]

T3I: Jupiter spent the afternoon in the workshop section, fussing over some gadget he was devising. It was a round metal object with a long handle, vaguely like a vacuum cleaner. A pair of headphones was connected by wire to the round metal section. "This is a metal detector," Jupiter said. [FE, pp.159, 161, 164].

FINANCED BY REPAIRING ITEMS:

BB: If he [Brains] needed money, he earned it by repairing electrical appliances for neighbors. [MM, p.14]

T3I: They [The Three Investigators] planned to pay the [phone] charges from the money they made repairing broken items for Mr. Jones. [TC, p.54]

• **LEADER'S CHARACTER** Here we see that Brains and Jupiter share many of the same distinguishing characteristics:

THE LEADER'S GENIUS RECOGNIZED:

BB: Here I was, just an ordinary everyday kid with a face full of freckles who brought home a so-so report card teamed up with a genius. Talk about stress and strain. [SD, p.16]

T3I: "Please!" Jupiter winced slightly. "Don't call me a genius. I simply endeavor to exercise my native intelligence to its fullest ability." [TC, p.70]

LARGE VOCABULARY:

BB: And, of course, he talked as if he were reading out of an encyclopedia. [MM, p.15]

T3I: "Jupiter likes unusual words," Bob said, controlling his impatience. "He's read an awful lot of books and sometimes he's a little hard to understand." [TC, p.4] "Even at a time like this you use long words," Pete complained. [TC, p.68]

LEADER'S STUBBORNNESS:

BB: He didn't even give me a chance to answer. Not that it would have done me much good. Brains was stubborn when he had an idea in mind. I knew where I was going to be at three o'clock, like it or not. [RR, p.32] Brains, however, didn't seem the least bit jittery. [MM, p.126]

T3I: But the stocky boy [Jupiter] could be very stubborn at times and admitting that he was scared was one of the things he was most stubborn about [TC, p.52].

LEADER PURSUES MYSTERIES "DOG"-GEDLY: Note the similarity of description:

BB: He [Brains] had that bird-dog look on his face. You could almost see that high-powered thinking apparatus of his churning away. [PD, p.50] [Brains] sat there beside me, wearing that

bird-dog look of his. Sort of bright-eyed and straining at the leash as if he just couldn't wait. He's plain nuts when he's on the trail of anything. [MM, p.126]

T3I: But the expression on Juve's face gave him the answer. Give Jupiter Jones a good mystery to solve and it was like handing a steak to a hungry bulldog—he wasn't going to give it up! [FE, p.63]

SIGNS LEADER IS THINKING: Once again, the description is close:

BB: I noticed Brains was tugging away at that left ear lobe of his, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger. I knew what that meant, Brains was thinking. Brains was laying plans. [WM, p.72]

T3I: He turned to Jupiter, who was sitting back, pinching his lower lip between thumb and forefinger, always a sign he was deep in thought. [TC, p.51]

LEADER CAN PURPOSELY APPEAR STUPID:

BB: [Brains] just ambled along, nice and easy, sort of whistling to himself and shuffling his big feet. He made a perfect picture of a not-too-bright kid who had wandered off from the fair. [MM. p.132]

T3I: [Jupiter] let his body slump, his face droop, his eyes half close. Jupiter, stocky enough to be called fat by his enemies, could indeed look fat when he wanted to. "Yes, sir?" Jupiter said. He spoke through his nose, and to anyone who did not know him, looked and sounded like a fat moron. [FE, p.54]

• **JUNIOR PARTNER'S CHARACTER** This is one of the main, consistent characteristics of Jimmy and Pete.

CHICKEN FOLLOWER:

BB: There was a lump in my throat that wouldn't go down! My teeth were still chattering when we left Yama. [PD, p.152]

T3I: "If I have to use this tape recorder," Pete said, "all you'll hear will be the sound of chattering teeth." [TC, p.36]

BB: "Nonsense," said X impatiently. "They don't dream they're under observation. We'll be perfectly safe. Come, follow me." [PD, p.122] "There is nothing there, Operative Three. You are allowing your imagination too full a play." [WM, p.54]

T3I: "The natural effect of mysterious sound and movement at night upon a susceptible nervous system," Jupiter said. "Forward!" [TC, p.40]

BB: "I saw his face!" Brains shouted. "After him!" I just groaned. I'd had enough. But Brains started loping down the path, and I felt I just had to go along. [WM, p.60]

BB: I would have left right then and there if I had any sense at all. But X was already on his way up the stairs. I couldn't let him handle it alone, could I? So, I followed him. [PD, pp.50-51]

T3I: Pete couldn't allow his partner to enter a place like Terror Castle alone, so he followed. [TC, p.42]

BB: Brains was already moving toward the ladder. There was nothing for me to do but follow unless I wanted to stay there alone. I surely didn't want to do that. I like crowds at a time like this. Even if it's only a crowd of two. [RR, p.125]

T3I: "Come on," Jupiter said. "We must discover where this passage leads." Pete joined him. He didn't exactly want to enter that secret passage and he didn't want to be left alone, either. It was better to have company, he decided. [TC, p.128]

BUT LEADER SOMETIMES RUNS, TOO:

BB: "Is that so," I said to myself, remembering plenty of times on other cases when Brains had been scared and had lit out on his frightened legs as fast as he could. I've got to admit, though, that I was always right with him—most often in front of him. [RR, p.28] Old tires, tin cans, broken bottles—nothing could slow me down. That rubbish dump was like a cinder track to me, and I was out to set a new world's record. But guess who beat me to the finish line? Believe it or not, it was Brains Benton! [CC, pp.146-147]

T3I: He didn't intend to run. His feet did it for him. They took him straight out the main entrance of Terror Castle and down the old driveway, running like a deer. Right beside him was Jupiter Jones. It was the first time Pete had ever seen his partner run away from anything so fast. [TC, p.48]

JUNIOR PARTNER READY TO ABANDON CASE: Again, a basic characteristic of both Jimmy and Pete.

BB: "Isn't that just dandy?" I said, trying to keep my teeth from chattering. "Now what do we do with them? Brains! Let's get out of here while we're still alive!" "That bunch must be having a conference. This may be our golden opportunity to discover their nefarious plans We could crack this case today!" "If they don't crack our skulls first," I wailed. [PD, p.122]

T3I: "If I'd known it was going to be like this," [Pete] complained, "I'd never have become an investigator." "You'll feel better after we solve the mystery," Jupiter told him. "If we can get its picture, we'll be famous." "Suppose IT gets US?" Pete retorted. [TC, p.38]

BB: "Brains," I wheezed. "I've just been thinking. Maybe this case is a little over our heads. How about calling in the FBI?" [PD, p.38]

T3I: "Let's put it to a vote," Pete suggested. "I vote we abandon the case now. All in favor, say aye!" [FE, p.93]

T3I: "I can tell you how to solve our problems," Pete said. "Just pick up that telephone and call Mr. Alfred Hitchcock and tell him we've decided not to find a haunted house for him. Tell him we break out into large lumps of goose flesh whenever we get near one. Tell him our legs go all wobbly and start running of their own accord." [TC, p.58]

UNIQUE EXCLAMATIONS: What can I say?

"Creeps!" I whispered [MM, p.38]. Repeated many times throughout all 6 books in the series.

"Gleeps!" Pete whispered to himself. [TC, p.17] "Gleeps, you're right," Pete said. [TC, p.119]

JUNIOR PARTNER HAS SURREALISTIC DREAMS ABOUT CASES: Another Jimmy and Pete characteristic:

BB: That night I had a dozen crazy dreams about dragons, landslides, cigar bands and pearls. [PD, p.152] Birds kept flying around me, darting at my head. A seal kept barking. And sort of in the distance, vague and shadowy, I could just make out a little white mouse doing a slow, graceful waltz. [WM, p.114]

T3I: [Pete] went on up to bed, but it was quite a while before he could fall asleep. When he did, he had vivid dreams of Indian tribesmen on horseback, all carrying sword-canes. [FE, p.96]

AFTER A HARD CASE, JUNIOR PARTNER JUST WANTS A PERIOD OF PEACE AND QUIET

BB: "Now, Operative X," I said to Brains, "we can forget about our code names. We can forget about being detectives and spend the rest of our vacation having a vacation." Brains frowned as he looked at me. "A detective can never relax. He must always be on the alert for crime. The firm of Benton and Carson must remain ever vigilant." [WM, p.187]

T3I: "But tell me, what are your plans now?" Pete was tempted to speak up and say their plans were for a little peace and quiet, getting over some of the harrowing moments that Terror Castle had provided. But Jupiter spoke first. "We are investigators, Mr. Hitchcock. We will start looking for another case at once." [TC, p.177]

• LEADER AND JUNIOR PARTNER'S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

LEADER ALWAYS WINS ARGUMENTS:

BB: As far as Brains was concerned the discussion was over. But I wasn't finished by a long shot. I told Brains that a battalion of marines couldn't drag me within a mile of Gorcey Street again. I told him it was probably illegal to force our way into the shop even though we knew we were dealing with counterfeiters, and that if any of the gang spotted us, we'd be sure to get hurt. It could even mean our finish! Brains listened to all my arguments. But I might as well have saved

my breath. For that night at eight when Brains Benton was slipping into the alley behind the Curio Shop, I was with him. [CC, p.117]

T3I: Pete kept saying wild horses couldn't drag him near the place, but when the time came to set out, he was ready. [TC, p.35]

BB: I didn't pull any punches. But when the ten o'clock bus left Crestwood and headed up the highway for Middlebury, Brains was on it. And so was I. [MM, pp.124-125]

T3I: "No!" Pete yelled. "I won't do it! As far as I'm concerned, Terror Castle is haunted and can stay that way. I don't need any more proof." [...] [But] Jupiter went on... "For tonight we make our final assault upon the secret of Terror Castle." [...] Terror Castle loomed in the darkness above Jupiter and Pete. [TC, pp.119-121]

BB: Oh, sure, I'd argued with Brains all the way home. I'd pointed out that it was the duty of every citizen to report a crime and not take the law into his own hands. I'd stated that it was plain suicide to go snooping around the Madden place again and that I wasn't having any part of it. But I might as well have been sounding off to a slightly deaf penguin at the South Pole for all the good it did. And in the end, you can see who got his way. Certainly not Jimmy Carson, otherwise known as Operative Three. [MM, p.35]

T3I: "Darn it," Pete said, "when we have an argument, why does Jupe always win?" [TC, p.99]

LEADER IGNORES PARTNER'S REMARKS:

BB: Brains had a way of ignoring direct questions—my direct questions—at times that got under my skin. [WM, p.27]

T3I: "As far as I'm concerned," Pete muttered darkly, "he is finished. I don't care to hear any more." Jupiter ignored this. "Anything else, Bob?" Jupiter didn't seem to hear him. He was concentrating on the strange message. [FE, pp.21-22]

Jupiter ignored the suggestion. "Our first problem," he stated, "is to determine who made that phone call last night." [TC, p.58]

BB: As a dressing down, it was a beauty. But Brains never heard a word of it. [CC, p.170]

LEADER KEEPS PLANS TO SELF:

BB: This was news to me. My partner hadn't confided any other idea to me. But that was like Brains. He didn't come out with his ideas until he was ready to put them into effect. I was dying to know. [WM, p.91]

T3I: [Jupe] must have done a lot of thinking that he wasn't telling them about yet. [TC, p.117]

BB: Brains had been mighty secretive in the last two days. He wasn't telling me all he knew. I didn't like that, but I did know that Brains always acted that way when he was nearing the solution of a mystery. He liked to have everything all wrapped up nicely and neat as a box of candy before he started handing out solutions. [RR, p.101]

T3I: When Jupiter had a scheme in mind, he usually preferred not to explain it in advance. So Pete did not ask any questions. [TC, p.69] "You're being awfully mysterious, Juve. I think you ought to let us in on your plans. After all, we're your partners." [FE, p.152]

BB: Brains had his gall bossing me around. Wasn't I an equal partner in Benton and Carson? [CC, p.29] I was getting pretty burned at Brains. Who'd he think he was, not answering any of my questions. [RR, p.47]

• SIMILAR STORY CHARACTERS

THE ROLLS-ROYCE:

RR: It's a big, white Rolls-Royce, gold-trimmed and a zillion years old. [RR, p.10] The body is like a big, oblong box. It's some box, though. The Rolls is white and trimmed with solid gold. [RR, p.74]

T3I: It was a Rolls-Royce of rather ancient vintage, with huge headlights like snare drums and a tremendously long hood. The body was square and boxlike. But all the trimming—even the bumpers—was gold-plated, and it gleamed like jewelry. The black body shone with such a deep luster it was almost a mirror. [TC, p.13]

NAMES:

The name "Worthington" appears in both series; in **BB** he is Henry Worthington, mayor of Crestwood, while in **T3I** he is the English chauffer of the boys' Rolls-Royce.

THE ROLLS' HISTORY:

BB: "This particular Silver Ghost was built to definite specifications from Prince Halam's father."

What a picture. This great big old Rolls, all white, trimmed with solid gold, rolling through the desert with two bodyguards in flowing white robes hanging on for dear life. [RR, p.115]

T3I: "This one was originally built for a rich Arabian sheik of luxurious tastes." [TC, p.14]

THE ENGLISH CHAUFFEUR:

BB: I liked talking to Froth [Frothingham]. He wasn't a bit stuck up, even if he did sound that way. [RR, p.34]

T3I: "I am Worthington, the chauffeur." [TC, p.14] Pete and Jupiter found themselves taking a great liking to the chauffeur. [TC, p.15]

SKINNY, GOOFY PEST: Notice the pests' nearly identical words, beginning with "You think."

BB: You never knew about Stony Rhodes. Sometimes he came right up out of the ground or out of a tree trunk when you least expected him. [SD, p.150] Thin-faced kid about five inches shorter than he should've been. [SD, p.62]

"You think you're pretty funny, don't you, Jimmy Carson?" Stony said in his piping voice. "Well, someday I'll get square with you. Just wait and see!" [SD, p.100] [Binky Barnes'] shrill voice midway between a screeching auto brake and a rusty gate. [CC, p.40]

T3I: "Skinny Norris kept hanging over my shoulder all morning, trying to snoop into what I was doing." "I hope you didn't let that goop know anything!" Pete exclaimed. "He's always trying to poke his nose into everything we're doing." [TC, p.28] "It would be just like Skinny to try to find out what we were up to." [TC, p.64] A tall, thin youth with a long nose. [TC, p.87] "[Skinny's] voice is more like a pony whinnying." [TC, p.93] "You think you're smart, don't you?" Skinny Norris demanded angrily. [TC, p.89]

SINISTER WHISPERY GUY

BB: Whisper. [CC, p.178]

T3I: The Whisperer. [TC, p.60]

• SIMILAR PLOT DEVICES

HAUNTED HOUSES:

BB: Madden house. "It was like a castle, sort of." [MM, p.19]

T3I: Terror Castle.

BB: And they claimed, too, that only a few of the people who rented the place after that stayed very long. And the ones who did went slab-dab crazy. [MM, p.19]

T3I: "For more than twenty years there's no record that anyone managed to spend a whole night there." [TC, p.33]

Notice the similar elements of the dramatic in Brains' and Jupiter's declarations:

BB: (Nervously) "You mean go out there to the Madden house?" "Naturally," Brains said. "Then, tonight, when the sun has sunk below the horizon and the shadows of evening are thickening, we will stalk the Madden residence. Do you understand?" [MM, p.25-26]

T3I: “Therefore, you must both get permission to stay out late tonight. For tonight we make our final assault upon the secret of Terror Castle!” [TC, pp.119-120]

Notice the similar equipment taken:

BB: He had a coil of rope looped around his middle and hanging from his belt were a hatchet, a hunting knife, and a camera. Brains was furious that he hadn’t brought along the portable tape recorder that he’d invented so we could get down Bimbo’s story word for word. [MM, p.54]

T3I: “Nevertheless,” Jupiter said, “we are going there—tonight. You and I will pay a preliminary visit to Terror Castle with camera and tape recorder.” [TC, p.34] He was carrying the portable tape recorder [TC, p.35]

QUICK-CHANGE ARTISTS TRY TO SCARE BOYS AWAY FROM SCARY HOUSE:

BB: “You mean you were Montgomery and Gustav?” I gasped. Bimbo nodded. “That’s right. Being a clown I was an old hand at quick changes. I had a few of my circus outfits with me and I thought I’d give Skeets a little fun and at the same time startle you, so you’d never come back.” [MM, p.61]

T3I: “You mean the two Arabs and the Oriental and the two women—they were all Mr. Rex and Mr. Grant?” Pete demanded, dumbfounded. “He’s right.” Mr. Rex sounded weary. “We were acting the part of a large gang to give you boys a real scare. The costumes with robes or skirts we could put on and take off very swiftly.” [TC, p.159] “That is correct,” Stephen Terrill’s eyes twinkled. “We used part of my large collection of wigs and costumes. I wanted to give you a lasting scare. I thought that if you were worried about the vengeance of a gang of smugglers, instead of mere ghosts, you might abandon your investigation of Terror Castle. You were really becoming much too persistent!” [TC, p.169]

DRESSING UP A DUMMY / MANNEQUIN TO DECOY A WATCHER:

BB: We dressed the dummy up in a shirt and a tie, and an old blue serge coat. Brains put it in a chair behind the desk. [SD, p.87]

T3I: “Now we must dress these dummies,” Jupe announced. From a distance you could have imagined [the dummies] were excited boys in the back seat. [FE, pp.161, 163]

ACCIDENTALLY BREAKING A PLASTER STATUE / BUST WITH JEWELRY INSIDE:

BB: Horsey reached out for the statue. “Hand that over this minute, Benton!” he snapped. Before Brains could move a muscle, Mr. Peters snatched the gold dragon from his hands. Or at least he tried to snatch it! Because the statue slipped from Peter’s fingers and dropped to the floor. In the next instant, the golden dragon lay shattered into a hundred pieces. But nobody was thinking about the dragon anymore because there amidst the chunks of broken plaster lay a triple strand of shimmering pearls! We’d found the necklace at last! [PD, p.182]

T3I: "Give it to me!" Black Mustache snarled. He gave an extra-hard jerk just as Jupiter, obeying his aunt, let go. The man staggered backwards, tripped over a rock, and fell to the ground. The bust rolled out of his arms and cracked into a dozen pieces. The boys stared at the pieces with mouths open. Mrs. Jones was too far away to see, but Jupiter and Gus and Pete and Bob saw it plainly. A red stone the size of a pigeon's egg, shimmering in the center of the broken plaster head! [FE, p.82]

THROWING A COUNTERFEIT OF THE DESIRED OBJECT TO DISTRACT THIEVES WHILE YOU MAKE YOUR GETAWAY:

BB: "Prince," I said in a hurry. "Take this. They'll think it's the Golden Vial. Just before they close in on us, toss it to me. They'll think I've got it, and you can rush out to the plane." Uncle Ed heard me. "Hey, swell idea." When the Duke was about ten feet away, I let out a holler. "Hey, Prince. Toss it to me!" The phony rose vase, wrapped in aluminum foil, came arching through the air. It did look almost exactly like the Golden Vial if the vial had been wrapped up in aluminum foil. [RR, p.181]

T3I: [Jupiter] bent over, fumbled around in the dirt, and picked up the stone. "Here it is," he said. "If you want it—take it!" And he tossed the stone high over Hugo's head. It made a tiny crimson arc in the air and disappeared in the darkness beyond. Hugo gave an ugly oath and spun around. "Find it!" he shouted. "Turn your lights that way." The lights all turned in the direction Jupiter had thrown the stone. Jupe gave orders of his own. "Run for the truck!" he said. "Fast! They won't shoot." [FE, pp.170-171]

These are only some of the parallels. It isn't possible to write about them all.

--- *Mark Coomer*

• **ROVING ROLLS and SILVER SPIDER: A Comparison**

Reading "Silver Spider" has reinforced my conclusion, eliminating any lingering doubt in my mind. But you judge for yourself. The main plot and other plot devices too much resemble Verral's "The Case of the Roving Rolls."

Here are my observations: Both Arthur's "Silver Spider" (SS) and Verral's "Roving Rolls" (RR) are about a prince from a very small nation: European (Varania) in SS, and Middle Eastern (Kassabeba) in RR. While in the United States, both princes want nothing more than to be treated as an average person. But in both plots, trouble is brewing in the home countries. Some time ago, the princes' fathers died under mysterious circumstances, and now the princes' guardians, acting as regents, are plotting to usurp the throne.

In both plots, an object of nationally symbolic value is missing, and without it the princes' coronations cannot proceed. In SS, that object is a silver spider, in RR that object is a golden vial. Both objects are cleverly hidden. The leaders of the boy detective agencies eventually

locate the objects and return them to the princes, ensuring the young men will ascend to their thrones.

Both plots include a premeditated automobile accident involving a Rolls Royce (both are 1920s Rolls that, by the way, were originally customized and trimmed in gold for an Arabian sheik). In SS, the villain who would usurp the throne is Duke Stefan; In RR an agent for the usurper, Ras-Bey, is a villain called The Duke.

Reading "Silver Spider" gave me that same been-there-done-that feeling that I got as a boy when I first read 3I after devouring the BB series first.

Both SS and RR are "far-fetched" in premise. But SS becomes TOO "far-fetched" from the beginning with the coincidence of the automobile near "accident" that introduces the 3I to Prince Djaro of Varania.

The far-fetchedness then continues with the 3I immediately escorting the prince around Disneyland; with the CIA contacting the boys and recruiting them as secret agents; with the parents and guardians of the boys approving of the scheme (without ever actually appearing in the story); with the boys traveling to Varania, outfitted with 1960s secret-agent technology, and so forth. The 3I become US federal agents under the watchful eyes of the CIA, breaking Don Holbrook's rule that boy detectives should be (unlike the Hardy boys) independent agents, self-motivated "youngsters EMPOWERED," and apart from the "officialdom" of the adult world.

In Roving Rolls, however far-fetched the premise, the reasons the boys become involved in the case are much more organic than in SS. As the fellow from the Enid Blyton website says in his review of RR, the background for the story, once told, comes across as developing naturally.

That is not to say that RR has no problems. The weakest element, in my opinion, is that neither Ras-Bey, nor any of his fellow-plotters who are searching desperately for the golden vial, have any inkling that concealed in the base of that vial is the Stone of Light and Wisdom which is ALSO a necessary part of the coronation. The reason given in RR is that Ras-Bey and Co. are nomadic people who have imperfect knowledge of all details. But it seems to me that to know about the golden vial should be to know about the stone, too. Or if not, then at least some weaselly Kassabeban official from the old regime who was in-the-know, but with compromised loyalties, would tell them about the stone.

In SS, Jupiter has almost no clue as to what to do next. The boys seem nearly helpless in the tide of events. Most of their time is spent escaping and hiding and running through stone corridors and stone rain sewers that are straight out of an old Hollywood movie set. Then they are re-captured, placed in a Hollywood-style dungeon/torture chamber (complete with iron maiden), escape again, and hide and run some more. And they couldn't accomplish even this much without the aid of a brother and sister team, acting as guides, who are part of an underground resistance movement known as "The Minstrels." The Minstrels are descendants of a minstrel couple who saved the life of the prince's grandfather, once upon a time, by hiding him from his

enemies. All descendants of that couple are now a special class of citizens who do not have to pay taxes to the Varanian government.

But that causes a plot problem: The Minstrels are embedded as spies, loyal to the prince, in the Varanian castle, working as everything from guards to ministers, yet Duke Stephan doesn't know who's who on his enemies list. Why not just check the tax records? Then the duke could purge all enemies from the castle.

The way in which Bob concealed the silver spider when the heat was on was clever. And Jupiter's discovery of where Bob had hidden the spider in no way cheated the reader of the clue as to its whereabouts (Verral in RR did not, unfortunately, signal the reader ahead of time about where the golden vial could be hidden, that is, inside the Rolls). The downside to the cleverness in 3I, however, is that Bob was forced to contract amnesia through a bump on the head after he had hidden the silver spider. So the question then became where Bob had hidden it if he could only remember. And he never remembered.

Another nitpick to the plot of SS is the revelation that an American couple, somehow representing a criminal organization that may be the American mafia, are following the 3I around Varania on their first day of sightseeing. The couple's organization, we discover, has some unnamed, blackmailing-type stranglehold on Duke Stefan, and if he ascends the throne of Varania then the mafia will virtually own a small European nation. After their revealing conversation is surreptitiously recorded by Jupiter using his CIA camera/walkie-talkie/tape recorder, the couple drop out of sight for the rest of the story and the mafia angle drops out with them.

And the idea that Jupiter produced a revolt among the masses of Varania by ringing a bell in the cathedral that, historically, was a signal to the populace that their beloved prince needed their aid was not convincing to me.

To sum: here we have in SS the same basic premise that drives the story in RR, including a couple of similar, although more minor, plot devices. But in the telling, SS spirals out of control, leaving me with the feeling that "That didn't happen, no way." In RR, by contrast, once the premise is accepted (and it's easier to accept it, fantastic though it may be), the rest of the story can be believed, overlooking the noted holes in the plot.

--- *Mark Coomer*