

THE DIAMOND CIPHER

A BASEBALL ROMANCE

By W. A. PHELON

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Secret Service Chief Wilkins, puzzled over the theft of the Government's cipher code...

CHAPTER II—Brockett, Chula Lon Kan, a Slav, and Ramon Solano, a Cuban, together with some twenty other youngsters practice baseball playing under the name of Wilkins' stenographers...

CHAPTER III—As an outcome of Brockett's cipher, the call to Ramon Solano is engaged by government for mysterious mission. Yastimoto, mysterious Jap, calls on Brockett.

CHAPTER IV—Brockett falls into Yastimoto's trap, a fight follows. Brockett coming out on top. Messenger McKane comes to rescue.

CHAPTER V—McKane was bearer of the mysterious cipher; is also a ball player.

CHAPTER VI—Yastimoto returns to headquarters and reports his failure to obtain the cipher to Ramon Solano. McKane Lawton, U. S. C. O. C. P. L. E., also reports to the Baron.

CHAPTER VII—Brockett and Solano have encounter with the Baron in which the latter comes out second best.

CHAPTER VIII—Brockett and Solano arrive in Jersey City; make appointment to meet McGinnity, the "Iron Man," baseball manager.

CHAPTER IX—Brockett and Solano arrive in New York and run into a Chinese Tong war; rescued by a white man.

CHAPTER X—The place of refuge found to be a trap; find themselves prisoners of Yastimoto. Kelly to rescue; mauls Jap out of \$10,000.

CHAPTER XI—Kelly turns the money over to Brockett.

CHAPTER XII—Brockett and Solano have encounter with tough gang, but are protected by Kelly's men.

CHAPTER XIII—On sleeper Cleveland-bound, the Baron detected; the act of killing Solano's berth, jumps from train.

CHAPTER XIV—At Detroit the messengers go to Yastimoto; Brockett and Solano in mysterious manner and depart for Chicago.

CHAPTER XV—Arriving in Chicago, the messengers are arrested; Brockett, the Baron again appears.

CHAPTER XVI—The Baron offers to assist in recovering the stolen papers.

CHAPTER XVII—The messengers find the stolen papers in the possession of a giant negro.

CHAPTER XVIII—After a fierce battle with Messers Brockett and Solano wake up in jail.

CHAPTER XIX—The Messengers are arrested; visit the Tenderloin in search of the stolen property.

CHAPTER XX—The thief is found in a "hop joint," a fight follows, and part of the Baron admits defeat.

CHAPTER XXI—Mysteriously reappearing another hidden message, the messengers board a train for the West and are later arrested by bogus Arkansas sheriff.

CHAPTER XXII—Brockett and Solano knock the sheriff and his deputies down and his deputies down and take to the woods.

CHAPTER XXIII—The genuine sheriff arrests Baron Zoller, and the boys resume their journey.

CHAPTER XXIV—The Messengers arrive on the Rio Grande and play ball with the troopers.

CHAPTER XXV—While playing ball Brockett is lassoed and robbed.

CHAPTER XXVI—The messengers meet the commander of the post.

CHAPTER XXVII—They start with important papers for the Mexican chief and run into ambush.

CHAPTER XXVIII—Brockett and Solano in the hands of brigands who demand the papers.

CHAPTER XXIX—Brockett sews papers up in baseball; at the game Brockett disappears; Zoller and Yastimoto appear to claim papers, also the Mexican chief.

CHAPTER XXX—Mike McKane comes upon the scene again as rescuer, and the Baron admits defeat.

CHAPTER XXXI—Brockett explains his cipher to the colonel, who says he will give him a "hint."

(Continued)

"Buena, bueno!" laughed Captain Torrelon. "Your friend will show how the fly ball should be caught, sir. Let us watch him."

Solano took two fly balls, each fairly well out, and backing beyond the ring of Mexicans to get them. Loud applause greeted his graceful handling of the chances. Then Brockett laid the wood against the ball with tremendous power. The startled sphere soared high, and Solano, starting at the crack of the bat, raced under the ball far down to the bushes' edge. Amid a volley of cheers, he leaped high, pulled down the ball—and then kept right on running. Before the astounded Mexicans could realize the trick, he vanished into the chaparral, sprinting like a madman, and with him went the ball that contained the messages to Gomez Esteral!

Juan Torrelon was a man to act with promptitude, no matter what the exigency. Horsemen could not ride through the dense undergrowth into which Solano had vanished, but twenty hands were on his track a moment later. The chief himself sprang at Brockett with a snarl of fury, and made a lightning search of the prisoner. The search brought forth the envelopes in which the original missives had reposed, and Torrelon, his fierce face lighting up a trifle, carefully stowed them in his own apparel.

He called a young Mexican to his side and ordered him to act as his interpreter.

"Tell the young man," said the colonel, slowly and with an apparent return of good humor, "that I was quite sure his friend had not carried off the papers, but that I wanted to make

roughness of the searching process. Five minutes before the other young man went out to catch fly balls, left hands had been over his clothing and found nothing. He, therefore, simply ran away, and left his companion to face the music. So be it. If he can be caught, all right, all well and good. If not, let him go his way—I give him credit for a clever escape. You and I, Senor Brockett, will meet the gentlemen with the unpronounceable names in a few hours—and we will bargain with them. Will it please you to go on with the baseball teachings?"

Noon came, and the bandits who had pursued Solano began to straggle in. They brought no prisoner, and declared that the young Gringo must have been carried out and befriended by the devil. Torrelon, courteous as ever, made Brockett eat with him, and asked him many questions concerning the great game of the Americans, its rules, its famous players. Towards one o'clock a sentry at the western edge of the clearing challenged loudly, and a moment later two bandits escorted a huge German gentleman to the presence of their commander. Ramon Zoller bowed pompously to Torrelon, and then smiled mockingly at Brockett.

"I see, mein friend," quoth the baron, "dot you vos, ad lasd, in safe hands. Vere iss your bartender?"

The baron was much worried at the news that Solano had escaped, but expressed marked relief at the information that the Cuban had not succeeded in getting away with the letters addressed to Gomez Esteral.

"Dot iss vell," he sighed, happily. "It iss, perhaps, better yet dot he haf gone—he haf nof nodings to say, und dere iss but de von left to dislose off. Shall ve get down to bizness? Vere iss de liddle ladders, gaptair?"

A sentinel at the northern edge of the clearing gave challenge, and two more of the bandits came across the glade. With them walked a little



AMID A VOLLEY OF CHEERS, HE LEAPED HIGH AND PULLED DOWN THE BALL.

brown man, suave and gentle—the little man whom Brockett thought long since dead in the waters of North river—the tireless agent of Japanese less than Mr. Yastimoto!

Baron Zoller greeted the Nipponese with a surprised, out with forced courtesy.

"I subseed," said he, "dot my abblintment vos exclusive mit de captain. Sdill, Herr Yastimoto, you are welcome. You understand, of course, dot I haf de virst und only claim to dese Esteral documents? De key off de cipher code, Herr Yastimoto, I will share mit you, und gladly. Iss dot agreeable?"

Mr. Yastimoto purred his dissent. The entire dossier of Esteral letters, as well as the cipher code, he explained, were his. After he had placed them in a new, airtight envelope, he handed the envelope to the little chief, Brockett, with a whoop of delight, fell upon the Cuban, who hugged him delightedly for a brief instant, and then turned smiling to Gomez Esteral.

"Why not let Baron Zoller keep his papers?" spoke Solano. "The real letters, Senor Esteral, are here."

Gomez Esteral took the battered old ball gingerly, as if afraid of a bomb-plot or a practical joke. He was sensing the comedy of the scene, laughed unrestrainedly for a moment, and then, taking the ball from the puzzled reader, ripped open the seams. The yarn was torn away, the papers came in view, and Brockett, still laughing, handed the crumpled missives to Gomez Esteral.

"Madre de Dios!" cried Juan Torrelon, "but that was cunning work! The craft of a fox! The generalship of a Napoleon! But what young friend, would you have done if you had not possessed this ball?"

Both boys joined in a peal of merriment. "That, Senor Captain," Brockett answered, "would have been the least of our troubles. We would have borrowed a new ball from you!"

Torrelon smiled his thigh with open palm. "Carramba," he shouted, "and I would have given it, beyond a doubt! Then I would have been ten times more the monkey and what you Gringos call the goat! Gomez Esteral, I am your prisoner. Do with me what you will—I do not care. After beholding a good joke such as this, I can meet any fate, well-satisfied!"

Gomez Esteral spoke gravely, thoughtfully. "There is much here to perplex and bewilder me. I will retire and reason out the full meaning of these letters. Rest you here, senores, all of you. I will return in perhaps an hour." And the little man, attended by two of the horsemen, disappeared amid the chaparral.

Baron Zoller drew the worthless envelopes from his pocket, tore them open, and stared at the blank sheets they had contained. Then, with a gesture of utter disgust and sardonic contempt, he offered them to Mr. Yastimoto. The Japanese struck them down from the German's hand, sank down upon the sod, and sobbed like a little child. Ramon Zoller drew himself up proudly, gallantly.

"For me," he spoke, "id iss all over. I may not go back to Berlin now. Young gentlemen, I congratulate you. You haf outwitted me from start to finish, und you haf dricked me mit de had. Vill you shake hands mit me?"

Brockett and Solano stood with bared heads as they clasped the baron's hand. A great soul had broken before them, and a patriot had come to the bitter ending of his dreams. They clasped the German's hands—and all was silence save the sobbing

true, also, that I did accept money from you both. That money, however, was but a retainer, an advance fee, let us say. Here are the letters, intact, even as I but a few hours since took them from this young caballero. Suppose, senores, that you make further offer for them?"

Baron Zoller emitted a snort of indignation. "A hold-up, iss id?" he fairly belted. "Vell, I should haf expected id. Here—and he dragged a capacious wallet from his inner pocket—'iss ten thousand dollars more Vill dot suffice your rabidity?"

Juan Torrelon bowed with all the grace of a true Spanish cavalier. "It will be ample, senor—unless this other gentleman desires to offer still more."

Mr. Yastimoto turned white beneath his saffron skin.

"I had imagined," he protested, "that the bargain concluded with the honorable captain was a business transaction. Unfortunately, I declared, I brought no money with me. Still, if the honorable captain will agree, I will bring twelve thousand dollars before the sunrise of another morning."

Torrelon shook his head.

"I fear," said he, "that present opportunity is accepted rather than future chances. Senor Zoller, permit me to present you with the documents in question."

Grunting with heartfelt pleasure, the German seized the envelopes and thrust them, unopened, into his pocket. Mr. Yastimoto, clenching his small brown hands in rage and disappointment, eyed him like a wildcat hesitating before a spring.

"Dere iss great need," said Baron Zoller, "dot I should haf dese led-ders. Herr Yastimoto, I repeat to you—you are cordially welcome to de cipher code. Vill you accept id from me tomorrow? Also, I promise you, you shall haf de opportunity to examine all portions of dese babers dot may concern you or your government. Vot say you? Vill you accept a second reading?"

"It seems to me," came a soft, well-modulated voice, "that a third reading will be better for Mr. Yastimoto. At least, that is my opinion."

Juan Torrelon, petrified where he stood, was staring open-eyed and open-mouthed at a small, almost insignificant individual, standing not ten feet from the bandit's side. The members of Torrelon's guard suddenly converted into most peaceful citizens, had dropped their arms and were ranged in meek and gentle groups along the glade. Across the clearing was streaming a long column of superbly armed and mounted riders; additional horsemen were already holding every exit from the camp-ground.

"I believe," the little man resumed, "that every man is entitled to a first perusal of his own correspondence. Will you kindly hand those envelopes to me, Herr Zoller? I am Gomez Esteral."

CHAPTER XXX.

Baron Zoller buttoned his coat, clenched his fist, and snarled defiance. "No! Nefert!" he roared, stepping forward and glaring at the little leader—"Dere dam offer iss dead body—if you..."

Gomez Esteral smiled compassionately.

"I do not wish to be too strenuous," said he. "Still I think we can obtain the letters without having to commit any massacres."

The close-ranked horsemen opened up a lane and Ramon Solano, leaning on the shoulder of a small, stocky, redheaded boy, limped up to the little chief. Brockett, with a whoop of delight, fell upon the Cuban, who hugged him delightedly for a brief instant, and then turned smiling to Gomez Esteral.

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of the little Japanese, unnerved and overwhelmed.

"Id vos not a fair contest," the baron said, patting the boys on the shoulder. "Dere was you two—und against you twenty spies und skilled hunters of men. Sometimes, Herr Yastimoto und I worked together. Sometimes ve worked apart. Mit all de resources at our command, we licht upon de draft—two men can hardly vool twenty. Ve did all ve could—und yet you beat us, best us at every place, und in every city. At last, here in Mexico, I believed ve had you—und you gave us de checkmate at de last turn off de rook. Dot, ag, I congratulate you. You vill be great some day—I, Baron Zoller, crushed und beaten, say it now!"

"He didn't count de numbers right dere," piped up the small red-headed

younger who had escorted Ramon Solano to the scene. "Where'd de hull bunch o' yousa a' been but for Mike McKane, I'd like tuh know?"

"What id I like tuh know," queried Brockett, "is how you happened to get down here, anyhow? Who turned you loose?"

"Turned loose nottin'," answered Mike McKane. "Didn't I tell yousa guys I was gonn' on dis trip? Well, I made good. Lissen tuh me, boys; yousa two left a track so wide yuh coulda driven an ortermobile over it. When yousa left Washin'ton I was right in de neighborhood. If yousa wunter know, yud'a hadda heap o' trouble gettin' clear from dat street fight wid de bulls but de way. I pointed 'em up de alley, an' dey went up like a lotta boobies. After dat, it was plumb easy fer me to keep in touch wid yousa. One or two times, yousa did a doublet act, like a guy tryin' to throw de shadows off when his wife has hired de Pinkster watch 'em, but I kinda figured out just where yud' be liddle light—an' I didn't miss out once. Did dem letters have yousa a-guessin'?"

"Well, rather," cried Brockett. "What's de explanation?"

"Explanation's dead soft," grinned the messenger boy. "Tuh see, old Chief Wilkins an' General Cole has alvays thought I had de goods in me fer a Sherlock Holmes. So when yousa was all framed up fer de trip dey calls me in an' tells me to hang 'round in de vicinity, see? And tuh keep a close eye on yousa, do all I could to help yousa, an' if yousa got stalled at de finish, to shoot home de news. In oder words, I was guardian an' shadow over de whole journey an' de letters was jest part of it. It was a pipe fer me to learn your cipher—any baseball bug can easy do it—an' as fer de letters, I can say dis: I may talk on de Fritz, but at school I alvays got any spellin' prices dat was to be had jest part of it. You must have kept in touch with the chief, too, didn't you?" asked Solano.

"I surely did. I was de live wire, de line-of-communication, an' I just ferried along some letters dat de chief an' de general managed tuh get tuh me. I was Johnny off de spot right up to de finish—an' I'm thinkin' dere'd have been a different finish today but for me."

"That's right," cut in Solano. "You noticed I was limping a little, didn't you? I was making the best speed I could to get away from our friend Torrelon's people, when, maybe two miles out of camp, I wrenched my ankle. There was almost on top of me when this imp of Satan jumped out from a patch of cactus by the road. Somehow or other he dragged me into the bush, and there was crouched while the hunt went by. They are good trackers and it was long before they were back, all round the spot where I had disappeared. Mike proposed to give them a fight as soon as they found us, and I think he'd have cleaned up their whole company—only he didn't have to. They couldn't have been ten feet from us when Gomez Esteral rode up with 300 men, and that changed the story."

"You never thought to ask how dis Gomez party happened along in the neighborhood dis?"

"I take my hat off to your code—it is a marvel!"

the colonel. "By the way, there is quite a lot of news from Washington besides your promotion, Mr. Brockett. Chief Wilkins' stenographer, Miss Lawson, will not be there when you return. You can probably imagine why. No arrest, no trouble—nothing at all. For the good of service, you understand? This redheaded imp (Mike McKane looked combative for an instant) is to go into the secret service—the chief says he regards him as a most promising junior operative. How about dying that hair, young man? That sunset head would tip you off to every crook in North America."

"Aw, dat's nottin'," remarked the crimson-head. "Trouble an' wisdom soon turn de hair white an' make a guy look dignified."

"A fil from Chicago, also, gentleman," resumed the colonel. "Agular the Filipino with whom you had some exciting experiences, has been identified as one of the last ladres, or muzzon robbers, that prowled the island of Luzon. Nice reward for his capture. I would suggest that it be divided up between yourselves and the policemen who made the capture. The big negro whom Agular stabbed will get well."

"Glad of it," interrupted Mike McKane. "It would be a big, good-natured mutt to me when I slipped him a cipher letter in Detroit."

The colonel laughed good-naturedly, and continued: "Everything that you were asked to do has been done with honor, young gentlemen. And now, boys, there is one thing I wish you would explain to me—I have official permission from General Cole to receive enlightenment upon the subject. Will you kindly map out to me the details of the secret cipher? It is easy enough to write and work out when you have the key—but what is the basic foundation of the key? I've tried every way I could imagine to work it out. I understand that the best cipher expert of Germany and Japan found the task hopeless and impossible. That was one reason for their anxiety to get the key away from you. Just to satisfy my own curiosity, I have submitted the code to three American gentlemen who were supposed to be marvels in deciphering puzzles of the kind—and they gave me up in anger and abasement. They said that there was no law, no logic, no foundation from which to unravel such a cipher. So much the better. That made it the safest and surest thing in secret service codes that anyone ever invented. It is a marvel—I'll take my hat off to it—but, just to ease the old age of a bewildered man, you will show me the idea and the backbone of the thing."

"It's as easy as A B C," said Brockett. "If you start it right and get ac-

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quainted with it. As you doubtless understand, the terms used are all borrowed from baseball. That's easy enough, isn't it?"

"It ought to be," assented the colonel, "but how about the order and sequence of the hieroglyphics?"

"Well, here you are," said the inventor. "I took a guide-book, a baseball book covering the season of 1910, as my model, and classified things in this fashion:

- 1-P.
2-C.
3-LB.
4-2B.
5-SS.
6-3B.
7-RF.
8-CF.
9-LF.
10-Sub.
O-Umpire."

"Not bad," chortled the colonel, as this last announcement was read. "Go ahead—this is good."

"I decided," Brockett continued, "to let 100 stand for the word 'manager'—used either way, of course—and 1,000 stand for 'magnate.' Certain figures, to make the cipher a trifle harder on unravelling, were then added from the averages. If, for example, I had a canon to use the figures 385 in any connection, I used the word 'COBB.' 385, you see, was Cobb's batting average on the 1910 season."

"That word," laughed the colonel, "proved the death-blow to one of my experts who had been getting along swimmingly till he encountered it. Go on, son."

"The letters of the alphabet," Brockett resumed, "were taken from the details at the heads of columns in the scores, or from the details at the lower portions thereof. Let me show you the idea:

- A-Pos.
B-AB.
C-R.
D-BH.
E-SH.
F-BB.
G-2BH.
H-3BH.
I-HR.
J-TB.
K-BA (batting average).
L-PO.
M-A.
N-E.
O-TC (total chances).
P-FA (fielding average).
Q-IP (innings pitched).
R-LV.
S-L.
T-To (taken out).
U-Fin (finished).
V-T (tied).
W-BB.
X-LB (hit by pitcher).
Y-WP (wild pitch).
Z-SO.
And-2B.
The-ER (earned runs).
Of-LB (left on bases).
Some of the last-named abbreviations," Brockett said, "are really just ornamental, but can

help to puzzle anyone of an inquisitive nature. Then, too, you can use the order in which the teams finished in 1910 to designate the terms first, second, third, etc. See how fit all runs?"

The colonel looked over key and code once more, and then solemnly shook hands with all three of the youngsters.

"Boys," said he, "I surrender at discretion."

"Shall we leave tomorrow?" asked Brockett, as the common citizens were arraying themselves for the decisive game against the cavalry. The Cuban nodded, emphatically.

"Not that it isn't pleasant enough 'round here," explained Ramon Solano, "and we could put in the whole month of your leave-of-absence among good friends. Still, I want to go back east. By the way, how about that ball—the ball that Deleahanty gave you?"

Brockett sighed sympathetically.

"You have my condolences, Ramon. I really wanted you to have that ball, but it so happens that it was the very ball in which I put those messages that night near Rancho Nogal—and Gomez Esteral now holds it as a souvenir."

"I'll go over and coax it away from him," volunteered Mike McKane.

"Not a chance," negatived Brockett. "Not a chance. Esteral prizes that ball above all other trophies, and you'd be lucky to escape unharmed if you tried to get it. Sorry for you, Ramon—there's one of your dreams that won't come true."

"It looks that way," smiled the Cuban. "Still—there are other dreams. That's why I want to go back east tomorrow. I promised that I would pay a call upon your sister, Harry—and the call is overdue."

Solano's dark face flushed frankly; Brockett began to whistle, and Mike McKane nodded away toward the

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