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AudioBooks

COMPLETE
CLASSICS
UNABRIDGED

Sapper

THE FINAL COUNT

Read by **Roy McMillan**



A BULLDOG DRUMMOND ADVENTURE • 4

CD 1

1	Introduction	7:05
2	Chapter 1	6:46
3	'However, all that is neither here nor there...'	6:24
4	I shouted down the mouthpiece...	5:53
5	A creaking on the stairs...	6:33
6	'Inspector MacIver coming at once...'	6:00
7	His eyes were fixed on the dead...	6:51
8	Chapter 2	6:13
9	For a moment or two he drummed with...	5:50
10	'Now I was in that house at four o'clock...'	6:33
11	He strolled out of the room...	7:32
12	Looking back on things now after the lapse...	7:36

Total time on CD 1: 79:21

CD 2

1	Chapter 3	8:17
2	For a moment or two I listened...	6:28
3	'Look here, Stockton,' said Drummond suddenly...	6:52
4	'Come in, man, come in,' muttered Drummond...	6:34
5	He stared around the room, and then he lit...	7:43
6	The car pulled up in front of his house...	5:51
7	Cowering in a corner, her eyes dilated...	6:06
8	Chapter 4	5:38
9	'There's a far more interesting point...'	6:53
10	'Poor old MacIver's boots are fuller...'	6:15
11	'It's serious, Stockton; deuced serious...'	5:29
12	'Well, there was nothing for it...'	5:14

Total time on CD 2: 77:28

CD 3

1	Chapter 5	6:00
2	We pocketed our masks and gauntlets...	6:00
3	They were saved the trouble...	6:14
4	And then like a flash it happened...	5:13
5	And then something made me look...	6:08
6	'Then gorse bush wasn't Carl. But that woman...'	7:21
7	Chapter 6	7:10
8	'Look 'ere, you bally twitterer...'	6:54
9	'What is your reconstruction?' said MacIver...	6:33
10	'If you come upstairs, Miss Simpson...'	6:09
11	'Well, what do you suggest? We'll have got one...'	8:09

Total time on CD 3: 71:57

CD 4

1	Once again we relapsed into silence...	4:11
2	He slipped the box into his bag...	4:56
3	Chapter 7	5:28
4	The only ray of comfort during the weeks...	5:46
5	And then on the 20th of June occurred the next...	5:40
6	The second difficulty was financial nervousness...	6:17
7	The men consisted of the owner, three American...	5:55
8	Chapter 9	7:13
9	'Tourists, old lads,' remarked Drummond...	6:48
10	It was as I was coming to the conclusion...	5:54
11	We weighed up the points for and against...	6:32
12	Once more we started off...	6:37

Total time on CD 4: 71:24

CD 5

1	Chapter 9	5:45
2	'Get out, you fool,' snarled Helias...	6:57
3	I caught one glimpse on Helias's face...	5:39
4	He stood there for a moment with the liquid...	6:35
5	We could see the details of the airship now...	6:35
6	Chapter 10	6:19
7	My starting-point, somewhat naturally, was...	6:58
8	He professed to be keenly interested...	7:29
9	But where to hide them?	5:46
10	The days dragged on into weeks...	5:40
11	'And what if I refuse?' I said...	6:29

Total time on CD 5: 70:19

CD 6

1	Chapter 11	7:18
2	Yesterday I had a strange thought...	6:01
3	'Twelve minutes,' he remarked as the pump...	5:56
4	It was two days ago that they let me out...	6:09
5	I looked and saw a vessel tearing through...	7:12
6	That's how he talked: the man is not human...	5:14
7	Chapter 12	6:48
8	And so we returned to the hotel...	6:24
9	'Think, man,' he answered. 'At a liberal estimate...'	6:50
10	Suddenly the eyes of the two men met...	7:10
11	It was then that real pandemonium broke loose...	6:53
12	Chapter 13	6:55

Total time on CD 6: 78:58
Total time on CDs 1–6: 7:29:27

Sapper

(1888–1937)

THE FINAL COUNT

There seems to be an inexhaustible demand for action heroes. From the earliest fictions to the current films, television series, novels and graphic novels, our appetite for the hero (and it does tend to be hero rather than heroine, Lara Croft notwithstanding) has maintained an astonishing vigour. After the previously unimaginable destruction of the First World War, it would have been understandable if the public had turned away from violence and decided to allow their imaginations to exercise in calmer fields of interest, or at least with heroes who would be less physical in their determination to uphold what is right. This was not the case. In both the United States and Britain, the glut of hard-talking, fast-shooting, morally certain sluggers poured out into the eager hands of a public who – if nothing else – clearly

liked to know which side was the good one, and to see it win comprehensively. In inter-War Britain the man who found the perfect action hero for his time was Herman Cyril McNeile, who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Sapper’ and created one of the genre’s most iconic characters: Bulldog Drummond.

McNeile was born in Cornwall to a Naval man (at the time the governor of a Naval prison), and went from school to the military academy in Woolwich, London. From there he joined the Royal Engineers, whose underground tunnellers were known as ‘sappers’ (hence his later nickname). He was with them throughout the War and was awarded the Military Cross in the process; but he seems to have been writing before the outbreak of the War. It is not easy to be certain, since serving officers could not use their

real names in articles or stories, which was why he needed a pseudonym in the first place. By the end of the War he was already a successful and popular author and he resigned from the Army to write full-time, publishing the first of the Bulldog Drummond books in 1920. They continued to appear until his death, upon which Gerard Fairlie (McNeile's friend and one of the inspirations for Bulldog Drummond himself) continued the series into the '50s. Although many of McNeile's works were popular, it was his Bulldog Drummond stories that seemed to capture the public imagination most forcibly (and most often – there were scores of radio and film adaptations as well as books).

Drummond served as a perfect bridge between several worlds. McNeile recognised that the character was a new version of older sleuthing types such as Sherlock Holmes and Raffles, and thus linked pre-War Britain (or more particularly England) with the contemporary realities of the 1920s. What he could not have known was that his character would himself prove a model on which future writers would base their heroes. The

creators of The Saint and James Bond readily acknowledged their debt to Sapper, making him a development in the story of detective and adventure stories from the late 19th through to the 21st centuries. The obverse of this popularity was that some writers became so infuriated with the all-pervasive influence of Drummond-like characters that they either spoofed them or went out of their way to ensure that none of their protagonists' qualities were in any way like them.

This is understandable. The idea of Bulldog Drummond has become so familiar, entrenched almost, that it is difficult sometimes to discern the strength and originality of the character; and the less appealing elements can be magnified beyond their true stature precisely because the caricature is so much more immediate. What was really there was a figure who embodied a particular kind of Englishness. Bulldog Drummond was independently wealthy and thus free of the day-to-day concerns of earning a living. He had 'done his bit' in the War – no shirking of national or personal responsibility – and done it with skill and

daring. He had no doubt about what was right and should therefore be protected, and he had no qualms about doing so with his fists or a gun. But what he also possessed was a particular kind of ironic solidity: a strength without vanity, realistic yet self-mocking, and allied to a sense of delight and absurdity. Life's a game, and it had better be a good one; let's have a martini at the club, old fruit, before we tackle the international master-criminal. McNeile called those who possessed these qualities 'The Breed'.

All this is admirable, feeds the Englishman's sense of himself, and adds to the gaiety of nations (as well as making many readers wish they were possessed of similar *sang froid*). But lurking within this was another set of values which were largely universal in the readership of the time but which frankly rankle now. Drummond is privileged, monied and seemingly unaware of the inequity of this. He has no doubts, and is never presented with anything where the right course to adopt is questionable. He assumes that the values of the Empire are all good, and that pretty much all foreigners are

not to be trusted, and can be dismissed with derogatory adjectival promptness. Concerns about these shortcomings are valid, but they are not the core reason for the continuing appeal of the books and should not obscure what that appeal is. They are failings but they also reflect the attitudes of the time; and, most significantly of all, they are no more than minor interjections in the text rather than its essence.

Its essence is a pounding good adventure story; a thriller where the plot races with gusto, where the villain is able to adopt disguises that can fool the closest inspection, where bizarre and terrible characters can plot outlandish heists, where we can trust the hero and wonder how he will escape, enjoying his unruffled wit as he faces what must surely be a gruesome death. There is a rich canon of these adventure stories, one that continues to grow. Bulldog Drummond sits proudly at the head of it, charming, brave and undaunted.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Roy McMillan is a director, writer, actor and abridger. For Naxos AudioBooks he has read *The Body Snatcher and Other Stories*, *Bulldog Drummond*, *The French Revolution – In a Nutshell*, *Cathedrals – In a Nutshell* and the introductions to works by Nietzsche and the Ancient Greeks. He has directed readings of Hardy, Hopkins, Kipling, Milton and Blake; Austen, Murakami, Conrad and Bulgakov, among many others; and has written podcasts and sleevenotes, as well as biographies of Milton and Poe. He has also directed plays for BBC Radio 3 and 4.

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