

# BLACKSHIRT BLACK SHEEP

OR  
The Chink in the Armour  
of  
Funiculi di Funicula

*Based on a cable message from Rome, July 3: "Of 64 high Fascist directors, only eight passed all the athletic tests. . . . The events included vaulting over a row of upright bayonets, jumping from a springboard through a blazing hoop, and vaulting over a war tank."*

By  
GORDON MIRAMS



*"From the very first, Pietro Funiculi showed his undeniable claim to be a super-Fascist. . . ."*

**P**IETRO FUNICULI was a most difficult bambino. He had none of the virtues and scarcely any of the more spectacular vices of Italian childhood. To his anxious parents, he seemed to be entirely lacking in ambition.

The Funiculis were very strong on ambition. They came of sturdy peasant stock—as far back as there were records, the Funiculis had tilled the sweet soil of the valley of Funicula, high up in the Apennines—and the oldest inhabitants of the village still spoke of the great day when Rigmorole Funiculi, Pietro's great-grandfather, had beaten champions from all over Italy in a spaghetti-eating contest, as a result of which he suffered a severe attack of Apenndicitis. And this same Rigmorole had also been the best man in the Apennines for vendettas, until the day came when, finding that there were no more enemies left to kill, he became so angry that he stabbed himself fatally in the back.

But there didn't seem to be a single drop of old Rigmorole's rich red blood in the sluggish stream that flowed through little Pietro's sickly veins.

Listlessly he would don his little black shirt each morning. It might have been red or brown for all he seemed to care. And every day there was a scene when his plate of spaghetti was put before him at breakfast. "Oh, take the nasty stuff away," he would cry. "I don't want any worms to-day."

## In Wolf's Clothing

**A**ND then, while Pietro's many brothers and all the other little boys in the little village were outside proudly toddling up and down with their little wooden rifles, learning how to be good little Fascists, there would be Pietro hiding under his mother's voluminous skirt in the tiny kitchen.

Of course, he had to do a certain amount of training with the local Wolf Cubs, but if ever there was a sheep in wolf cub's clothing it was little Pietro Funiculi.

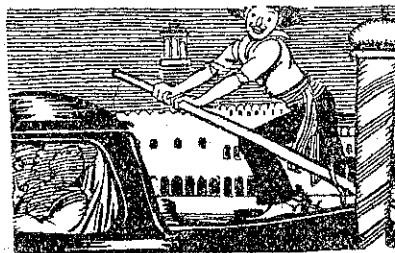
His only remarkable feature was his voice. Even for a small boy, it was very high and girlish.

"Oh well," sighed his father resignedly, "It is the will of Heaven. There's nothing for it but to make him a gondolier or, failing that, a grand opera singer."

**C**AME the day that was to alter Pietro's whole life.

He was ten years old at the time. Signor and Signora Funiculi had had to come down from the hills and go into Rome on business, and as none of Pietro's married brothers and sisters would let him stay with them for fear that he would contaminate their own children, his parents had to take Pietro with them.

To keep the child occupied Papa Funiculi secured him a ticket to see Mussolini's Mammoth Circus, a spectacular entertainment which was offered free to the Roman populace in place of bread. There was a cast of 64, all high Fascist directors. They were the best-paid entertainers in Italy, and they performed under the personal supervision of Benito Mussolini, the world's greatest showman.



*. . . Nothing for it but to become a gondolier.*

As Pietro watched the show with awe-struck eyes, something happened to the lad. For the first time in his life, he knew ambition. He, too, would become like those brave athletic Fascists who were leaping over hedges of bayonets, jumping through blazing hoops and vaulting over war tanks while Mussolini cracked his whip.

So this was what Fascism meant. . .

## A Rapid Change

**I**T was a very silent and very thoughtful boy whom Signor and Signora Funiculi took back to the valley of Funicula in the high Apennines. But somehow, they felt that he was changed, and very soon they had evidence that surprised and delighted them.

On the morning after the return from Rome, Mama Funiculi surprised Pietro standing in front of a mirror with a curious, tense expression on his face. His receding chin was thrust forward in a way that was positively startling, and he was vigorously massaging it with garden fertiliser. At first Mama Funiculi thought that he must have gone out of his mind, until she noticed that he kept looking at a photograph of Mussolini.

From then on, the change was rapid. The intensive jaw exercise and massage took effect, and Pietro's chin became positively craggy. But more (Contd. on page 39.)