

NO MATE

By CHESTER CUTCLIFFE

ILLUSTRATED BY DUNLOP

This month's teenager story... the 18-year-old author, who comes from Boorowa, N.S.W., is studying Science at Sydney University.

BOB had not been pleasantly surprised when his mother had told his father at the dinner table that she had had a letter from her brother, Allen, to say that he was arriving the next day on a short visit. Bob knew all about those "short visits."

Three times before in his fifteen-year-old life Uncle Allen had paid them a "short visit." The first time he had stayed for six months.

Mr. Jackson received the news dependently, making the remark, "I suppose he timed it so that you had no opportunity to telegram to put him off."

"Well, that isn't a very nice thing to say." Mrs. Jackson was slightly annoyed. "He's my brother, and we haven't seen him for three years."

Mrs. Jackson had forgotten the irritating fads and peculiarities of her brother which had almost driven her to tears when he had last been staying with them.

"But it's true, isn't it?" insisted Mr. Jackson. "He didn't give you a chance to say that we had guests or that Bob had chickenpox, did he?"

"But we haven't guests and Bob hasn't chickenpox, so it's all right," said Mrs. Jackson, with irrefutable logic. "I'll be very pleased to see him when he arrives tomorrow."

"You may be pleased to see him tomorrow, but how will you feel at the end of a month? Having to listen to his talking at you, night and day, almost nonstop for 28 days, 672 hours, 40,320 minutes..."

"Stop it!" snapped his wife. "I'll be pleased to have him as long as he likes to stay. He may talk a little too much, but it's intellectual talk, and I'll be glad to see him."

"Famous last words," whispered Mr. Jackson to his son as Mrs. Jackson went out to the kitchen. "I bet she'd eat her words if we played back a recording of this chat in a month's time."

Bob had a clear recollection of Uncle Allen, although he had been only twelve when his bachelor uncle had last stayed with them. (His father had said that no woman would marry Uncle Allen, because she would not be able to get even a word in edgewise.)

At that time his uncle's conversation had been for the most part above his level, and an enmity had grown up between them, especially after Uncle Allen had accidentally walked into a stream of water from Bob's water pistol on his way to church one Sunday morning. Uncle Allen had not been amused.

Hostility had increased when Uncle Allen had said in a supercilious voice, "Robert," (Uncle Allen did not approve of contractions), "is rather under-developed, is he not?"

This had been a bit below the belt, for Bob was the smallest boy in his class at school and the other boys did not let him forget it.

Now, after three years, Bob was willing to overlook the more disagreeable traits in his uncle's character, for he remembered the ten-shilling note which his uncle had given him at the end of his last visit. Perhaps this time he would receive a pound. Bob was saving up for a petrol aeroplane engine, and if Uncle Allen left him a pound he would have sufficient money to buy the engine.

Bob hoped that Uncle Allen remembered his good points and had forgotten the water pistol episode.

When Bob came home from school the next afternoon he found his uncle sitting up in the most comfortable armchair, talking to his mother over afternoon tea. Uncle Allen continued to talk while his mother prepared the tea, talked to his father, who was just home from work, and talked during the meal.

After tea Mr. Jackson felt he had earned a rest from the chatter.

He owned a barber's shop, so he had to talk to and listen to his customers during the day and in the evening he wanted to relax with the newspaper. Seeing that his brother-in-law was about to buttonhole him, he thought quickly.

"I suppose you play chess?" he suggested. "Why don't you give Bob a game while his mother and I do the washing-up?"

"I am not such a Philistine as not

to play chess," said Uncle Allen severely. "I shall be only too delighted to give Robert the benefit of my superior knowledge. The word 'chess,' as you may not know, is derived from the..."

"Quite so," cut in Mr. Jackson hastily, "but I must get on to that washing-up."

Bob had saved up to buy a heavy chess set, of which he was quite proud. Uncle Allen did not deign to admire the pieces, although they were delicately carved.

With the beginning of the game a change came over Uncle Allen. He stopped talking and concentrated. It was clear from the outset that he had no intention of making allowances for Bob's youth. But Bob played "A" grade chess for the school and asked for no concessions.

Uncle Allen opened with the Queen's Gambit and Bob, realising that his father would appreciate the game's lasting as long as possible, spent plenty of time between moves, thinking them out. When he managed, by a fine piece of combination work, to exchange a rook for his uncle's queen, Uncle Allen's forefinger crept up to his brow and began to twist a curl, which hung over his forehead.

Bob watched, fascinated, as the finger twirled the curl around and around while Uncle Allen's eyes surveyed the position. For ten minutes he neither moved nor spoke. Then he made his move.

Bob had been almost hypnotised by his uncle's curl. He found he could no longer concentrate on the game and, although he had the advantages of both superior forces and superior position, the enemy king managed to escape his threats and



All the time they played chess Uncle Allen twirled the curl that hung over his forehead.

Bob found himself unexpectedly mated.

"You play a rather unsound game," Uncle Allen said loftily.

Bob was annoyed, for he blamed his failure to win on the hypnotic qualities of his uncle's curl.

"I gave you a good run for your money," he declared defiantly.

"Money?" sneered Uncle Allen. "We were not betting anything on this game. I will tell you what we will do. We will play one game every night until my departure. If you succeed in beating me even once before I go I will give you a pound. If you do not win I will give you no present this visit."

"You're on," Bob exclaimed.

By this time Mr. Jackson had finished reading the newspaper and Uncle Allen went over to concentrate on him while Bob slipped away to do his homework.

The next night Uncle Allen won easily, but on the night after that the game developed into such a battle and lasted so long that Mr. Jackson finished the washing-up and the paper and came over to watch the game. Uncle Allen succeeded in winning again.

"I know I ought to be able to beat him," Bob confided to his father after several more failures. "It's the way he twiddles his hair that makes me lose. If only he'd stop it, even for one night, I'd have a chance."

Uncle Allen's visit dragged on and it was not until three weeks had passed that he announced that he would be leaving in two days' time.

"I'm sorry you're going," said Mrs. Jackson. (Was there a shade of relief in her voice?)

Mr. Jackson thought, "Thank goodness he's going," but Bob's reaction to the news was different. He now had only two chances, tonight and tomorrow night, in which to win the pound.

"As you're going home so soon, Allen, you had better come down to the shop tomorrow and I'll give you a haircut," Mr. Jackson suggested. "You can have your shoes polished or your nails manicured, too."

"Thank you very much. I should be pleased to take advantage of your

kind offer," said Uncle Allen formally.

That night Bob was again defeated, and as he went off to bed he realised he had only one more opportunity. He had analysed the games he had played with Uncle Allen and had tried to find out where he had made his mistakes. During his lunch-time at school he had spent his time watching his schoolfriends' games, particularly the opening moves, for he felt that with a good opening he could gain an advantage of position.

When Bob sat down to tea on the last evening of Uncle Allen's visit he noticed that his uncle's hair was neatly parted and shining with hair oil.

"Allen looks quite handsome now, doesn't he?" Mrs. Jackson said playfully to her husband, "You certainly gave him a good hair-cut."

After tea Mrs. Jackson stacked the dishes and then left them to watch the last game. Mr. Jackson put his paper aside and came over to sit beside her.

In the drawing of colors Uncle Allen drew white and opened the game with the Queen's Gambit. Bob took his time, trying to see as far ahead as possible the consequences of each move.

When he began to press the attack Uncle Allen's hand strayed to his forehead, seeking the lock of hair. His hand fumbled and then dropped to his lap again.

From then on he played with an air of desperation and seemed unable to concentrate. They played on for six more moves, and then Uncle Allen rose to his feet, knocking over his king.

"I concede this match to you," he said abruptly. He brought out his wallet and gave a pound note to Bob. Then, turning to his sister, he said, "I am rather tired and, as I have a long journey ahead of me tomorrow, I will go to bed. Good-night." He stalked out of the room.

"Good!" said Mr. Jackson. Then, jokingly, he said to his son, "You really ought to give me a ten per cent. commission. After all, I did make him lose by snipping off that curl while he was having his hair cut today."

(Copyright)