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Black Magic in a Harem

When English author Denis Clark visited Sicily a few years ago he hoped to secure an interview with the bandit Giuliano, who was then making world news. The many frustrations that prevented his meeting with the now-dead bandit are recorded by Clark in his delightful book of Sicilian adventures, *Swordfish and Stromboli*.

Clark and his wife Marietta found the people hospitable—too hospitable, in fact, for one of them, Salvatore, attached himself to the party as friend and guide. Some writers would have worked themselves (and the reader) into a fever of excitement over the tunny trapping, which was one of the highlights of Clark's experiences.

Clark, who accompanied the fishermen out to the great tunny trap made up of nets off Solanto, brings the scene alive, but without sacrificing description for a veneer of excitement.

Later in his travels he went out from Messina with the swordfish catchers. Their boats, as big as yachts, are propelled by oars and have a central 60ft mast, used only as a lookout.

Very few men can withstand the four hours of swaying 60ft up as they watch for the swordfish; those who can get double pay.

Most Australians usually associate Sicily with the Mafia; the secret society which once held the island in its power. Clark describes the terrorist methods of the Mafia and records how one of Mussolini's police chiefs destroyed the organisation.

While they were at Cefalu, the Clarks visited the old house once occupied by the English practitioner of the black arts, the late Aleister Crowley, who collected a harem of other men's wives.

Denis Clark records the experiences of local inhabitants who recalled the strange happenings in the magician's house.

Stromboli plays a minor part in the book. The Clarks visited the volcanic isle while Ingrid Bergman and Rossellini were making their film *Stromboli*.

Swordfish and Stromboli, by Denis Clark (Jarrolds, London). Dymock's. 18/9.