

TOM SWIFT AND HIS AQUATOMIC TRACKER

VICTOR APPLETON II

No. 23 in the Tom Swift Jr. series.

(1964)

The Tom Swift Jr. series:

- 1 Tom Swift and his Flying Lab (1954)
- 2 Tom Swift and his Jetmarine (1954)
- 3 Tom Swift and his Rocket Ship (1954)
- 4 Tom Swift and his Giant Robot (1954)
- 5 Tom Swift and his Atomic Earth Blaster (1954)
- 6 Tom Swift and his Outpost in Space (1955)
- 7 Tom Swift and his Diving Seacopter (1956)
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- 15 Tom Swift and his Spectromarine Selector (1960)
- 16 Tom Swift and the Cosmic Astronauts (1960)
- 17 Tom Swift and the Visitor from Planet X (1961)
- 18 Tom Swift and the Electronic Hydrolung (1961)
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- 21 Tom Swift and the Asteroid Pirates (1963)
- 22 Tom Swift and his Repelatron Skyway (1963)
- 23 Tom Swift and his Aquatomic Tracker (1964)
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- 28 Tom Swift and the Mystery Comet (1966)
- 29 Tom Swift and the Captive Planetoid (1967)
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- 31 Tom Swift and his Dyna-4 Capsule (1969)
- 32 Tom Swift and his Cosmotron Express (1970)
- 33 Tom Swift and the Galaxy Ghosts (1971)

From the front page:

Tom Swift and his pal Bud Barclay embark on one of the greatest scientific adventures of the century—a daring underwater crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, equipped only with Tom’s electronic hydrolung suits. Hundreds of miles from land, the hydrolung batteries inexplicably go dead and the two boys are dramatically rescued in the dark of night. Examination of their equipment reveals sabotage.

A complex clue leads Tom to believe there is a connection between the sabotaging of the hydro-lung and the sinking of the S.S. Centurion-which went down in mid-Atlantic with a fortune in gold bullion and a world-famous statue aboard. After making good on their second attempt to accomplish the nonstop swim under the Atlantic, Tom and Bud are given the assignment of salvaging the Centurion's valuable cargo. To locate the sunken ship, Tom designs the aquatomic tracker, an astounding device which detects and identifies metallic and chemical traces left by an object in water, then tracks the object.

How the young scientist-inventor outwits the vicious saboteurs and traps the most fiendishly clever mastermind of crime he has ever met makes a fast-moving story of super-suspense.

ILLUSTRATED BY EDWARD MORITZ

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## CHAPTER I

### THE DROWNING ROMAN

“Tom, this will be one of the greatest scientific adventures of the century!” declared Dan Perkins of the Shopton Evening Bulletin. “We’ll all be pulling for you!”

“Thanks, Dan.” Tom Swift Jr., the famous young inventor, and his friend Bud Barclay, grinned gamely as a crowd of reporters bombarded them with questions and comments.

“I venture to say it will rank with the first transatlantic flight and your first space orbit!” The TV interviewer extended a microphone toward Tom.

“If we succeed,” Tom said soberly.

The newsmen had gathered at the Swift rocket base on Fearing Island to watch the two boys take off on a daring underwater crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, equipped only with Tom’s amazing electronic hydrolung suits!

“Our faces will sure be red if we don’t make it after all this build-up,” muttered Bud.

Tom agreed. The tall, eighteen-year-old scientist had planned the test as a private experiment in

undersea survival and mobility. But due to the excitement and enthusiasm of Swift Enterprises' personnel, it had proved impossible to enforce the news-blackout order.

"How long will the crossing take?" a Consolidated Press reporter asked Tom.

"We estimate five or six days, based on the speed of our ion-drive jets."

"Isn't it dangerous for you two fellows to be going it alone with no rescue ship to accompany you?" a writer for Worldweek magazine queried.

Tom shrugged. "We're hoping to prove that man can truly adapt to inner space-that is, die undersea environment. The test wouldn't mean as much if we carried it out while tied to a ship's apron strings, so to speak."

"Are you sure this whole thing isn't more of a publicity stunt than a scientific experiment?" another reporter spoke up.

Bud sizzled at this remark, but Tom answered politely. "Please remember that we are not asking for publicity. This press conference was arranged only at the request of the news media."

Other newsmen backed up Tom's statement. Several apologized for their colleague's heckling query.

"I just want to know if the trip will have any practical scientific value," the reporter persisted, a bit red-faced.

"Scientists don't always limit their research to practical matters." Tom grinned. "However, this test will prove whether our gear can be used for survival at sea after shipwrecks and air crashes. We're also blazing a trail for later field study of the undersea environment at firsthand by oceanographers and marine biologists. And we hope it may open new possibilities in offshore mining and oil prospecting."

"Some experts even claim that man will have to seek new living space under the sea someday," put in Bud. "Isn't that right, Tom?"

"Right-but that day is a long way off, I hope," the young inventor added with a chuckle.

Presently Tom excused himself and Bud so that they could don their hydrolung suits. Harlan Ames, Enterprises' lean, dark-haired security chief, accompanied the boys out of the base's main building and climbed into a jeep with them.

"Neat job you did, skipper, fielding all those questions," Ames remarked as they sped to Tom's island laboratory.

"I still wish we could have skipped all the publicity," the young inventor said.

"So do I." Ames added dryly, "You're hard enough to guard without broadcasting any plans."

Fearing Island-a bleak, sandy dot off the Atlantic coast-had been converted by the Swifts into America's first spaceport. Its launching area bristled with skyscraper-tall rockets, including Tom's pioneering Star Spear. The island also served as a submarine base for his diving seacoasters and jet-marines.

Arriving at his laboratory, Tom strode to a shelf laden with chemicals and electronic equipment, uncorked a bottle of pills, and shook out three apiece for himself and Bud.

“Our final dose of space vitamins.”

“Our dad and Doc Simpson really gave skin diving a big scientific assist when they concocted these from those outer space plants,” Bud said gratefully.

“We hope so-but the real test of their effectiveness will be our days of underwater life,” Tom replied. “On shorter dunkings, they’ve done a great job of protecting our body tissues from antiosmosis troubles.”

“Down the hatch!” Bud gulped a swallow of water. “Okay-let’s get into our rigs!”

As the two hydronauts started into the one-room apartment adjoining the laboratory, a red light flashed on the control panel of the Swifts’ private TV network. Ames flicked on the videophone.

“Hold it, Tom!” he exclaimed as Blake, their Washington telecaster, appeared on the screen.

Tom and Bud hurried back into the laboratory.

“This may be important, skipper,” Blake said. “John Thurston has something to show you.”

Thurston, a calm-faced, balding official of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, stepped into view before the camera. “Hi, Tom.

All set to leave on your transoceanic marathon?”

“Bud and I were just about to get into our hydrolung outfits.” Tom smiled. “What’s up?”

“Take a look at this.” Thurston held up a photographic print, and Blake switched to a close-up so that it filled the video screen. The print showed a crude drawing of a Roman soldier sinking head downward into water. Below was a row of hieroglyphic symbols.

“What the dickens is it?” Bud asked.

“A radiophoto containing some sort of code message,” Thurston explained. “The FCC monitored this on an unidentified broadcast last night and turned it over to us.”

Tom frowned. “Have you doped it out yet?”

“We’re not sure. Our cryptographers have been working all night to crack the code. The message is too short to yield a positive solution, but they think it means-Stop Tom Swift.”

“Great Scott!” Ames exploded. “Have you any idea who or what’s behind the message?”

“Not a clue,” Thurston replied. “We were hoping you fellows at Enterprises might know.”

“I take it the message was a translation of the code symbols only,” Tom put in. “How about the drawing of the drowning Roman soldier?”

“It has us baffled,” the CIA man admitted.

Tom rubbed his blond crew cut thoughtfully. After a moment he said, “Well, no sense worrying about it. Thanks for telling us, John. Let’s go, Bud!”

“Hold on, Tom!” Ames protested. “You’re not going through with your trip after this warning?”

“Why not?” the lanky young inventor retorted.

“Too risky, skipper! Some enemy may be planning to attack you and Bud en route!”

Tom shrugged. “The message may not have been meant for us-besides, we can’t back out now. This experiment is important.” He turned to Bud. “What do you say?”

“Ditto.” The muscular, dark-haired young Californian, who was also Tom’s air and space copilot, grinned cockily. “Come on!”

Ames flung up his arms in despair.

“That’s what I expected.” Thurston smiled. “At least watch your step, Tom. Good luck!”

“Thanks, John. And we’ll keep our eyes open for any old Romans down in Davy Jones’s locker!”

As soon as the Washington telecaster had signed off, the boys hurriedly changed into their hydro-lung suits of rubberlike black plastic. Molded into each suit was an electronic device which extracted oxygen from the water for breathing, and a density-control unit for rising or sinking to any depth at will. At the back was a slender metal cylinder-the ion-drive jet, capable of propelling the submerged wearer at high speeds.

On his left wrist, each boy wore one of Tom’s miniaturized “porpoise” sonarscopes and a fingertip control to all units. Power was supplied by a Swift solar-charged battery. On the other wrist, the hydronauts wore depth-gauge calendar watches.

Pouches on their thighs contained sealed recording instruments, and Tom also carried detonators for sound-channel testing by SOFAR-Sound Fixing and Ranging.

The boys left their hoods-with built-in transparent face masks and sonarphones-unzipped and hanging down over their chests so they could talk freely before submerging. As they left the lab, Bud exclaimed, “Hey! Look who’s here!”

A blond girl with laughing blue eyes called from a parked car, “You didn’t think we’d let you go without a final send-off?”

She was Tom’s teen-age sister, Sandy. Their distinguished scientist father, Tom Sr., was at the wheel with Mrs. Swift beside him. In the back seat were “Uncle Ned” Newton, manager of the Swift Construction Company, with his wife and daughter, Phyllis-Tom’s favorite date.

The two boys managed to squeeze in, and Ames followed their car in the jeep.

When they arrived at the south dock, where many of the Swifts’ submarine craft were berthed, a roar of excitement rose from the newsmen and base personnel. Television cameras were maneuvered into

position and microphones were thrust close to Tom's and Bud's faces.

"What about your provisions for the trip?" a newsman inquired.

"Our suits are of double-walled cellular plastic and contain food in liquid form," Tom explained. "We'll draw through feeding tubes."

"How about that boxlike gadget attached to your belt, Tom?" a reporter asked.

"It's a portable, miniaturized automatic navigator for frogmen that I've developed. We'll be trying it out for the first time."

"And those handguns?" A TV man signaled his camera to zoom in. "Are they to repel sharks?"

Tom laughed. "No, they're a new invention of mine-an 'undersea light switch.' They emit a chemical that excites luminescent sea organisms and makes them light up the water. Of course, we have battery lamps, too, on our hoods."

Tom also explained that he and Bud would take turns sleeping-the sleeper to be propelled by jet while attached to his partner by a nylon line.

After final farewells from the Swifts and New-tons, the hydronauts donned fins and adjusted their hoods, then climbed down the dock ladder and descended into the watery depths, amid a blaze of cameras and cheers from the crowd. They were off at last!

"Here goes, pal!" Bud signaled by sonarphone.

Gunning their jets, the boys speared through the water at torpedo speed. Both watched raptly the greenish panorama of sea life all around them as their earphones crackled with noise. Fish swarmed through the jungles of seaweed and underwater vegetation. The bottom, glimpsed dimly below, was carpeted with sea anemones, urchins, finger sponges, and mollusks.

"Watch yourself, fly-boy!" Tom warned as he spotted a Portuguese man-of-war. Bud hastily veered from its stinging tentacles.

As they cruised outward above the sloping continental shelf, the hydronauts began their descent to a depth of sixty feet. Once they sighted a bony hull of an old sailing ship, covered with barnacles and half buried in sand and silt.

By early afternoon they had passed the shelf and were speeding eastward through the Atlantic depths. Vegetation disappeared and the sea life seemed far less luxuriant, although the boys frequently sighted schools of fish.

A few hours later the glow of daylight from above faded. Tom and Bud switched on their head lamps to pierce the darkness. Occasionally these were turned off while the boys triggered their undersea-light switches and enjoyed the eerie radiance that lighted up the sea all around them.

Long after midnight, while Bud was taking his turn at sleeping, Tom's jet suddenly sputtered and slowed.

Tom was alarmed. "My battery power must be conking out!" Worried about Bud, he hastily switched on the sonarphone. "Bud! Wake up!" There was no response. Turning, he saw that the head lamp on



Bud's trailing figure was dimming. Quickly Tom yanked the nylon towline.

Instantly Bud was alert. In a moment he became aware that neither of them was moving. Realizing that they had to reach the surface, Tom signaled for the two to adjust their density controls. As they neared the surface, the boys' heads suddenly felt woolly and their hearts began thudding, indicating a loss of oxygen supply through the recirculatory breathing tubes. They stripped off their hoods as soon as their heads broke water.

"Wow!" Bud gasped. "What happened to our reserve batteries?"

"Must be dying too-they should have cut in automatically," Tom replied.

"But we had the battery power checked out-how could it have gone dead?" Bud asked.

"I wish I knew," said Tom. "Well, we'll have to radio for help! Good thing that works on a separate system."

Treading water, Tom hastily extracted his miniaturized two-way emergency radio from a zippered pocket. He switched it on, then gasped in dismay as the set failed to respond.

"What's wrong? Won't it work?" Bud asked.

"Dead as a doornail! Try yours!"

Bud's radio, too, would not operate.

"What are we going to do, Tom?" Bud gulped.

The hydronauts were alone and helpless on the darkened Atlantic, hundreds of miles from land.

## CHAPTER II

### SOS!

TOM'S voice was grim but calm. "Press the 'inflate' button on your suit, Bud."

Bud obeyed, his fingers groping awkwardly. "Whew! I'd forgotten about that emergency system," he confessed. "I'm sure glad you thought of everything when you designed this gear!"

The action released gas from a CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge to fill an inflatable panel around their suits, just above the waist

"At least this'll keep us afloat should the battery power for our density controls go completely," Tom said.

Bud swallowed hard in the darkness. Somehow, Tom's words evoked a chilling picture of their plight-twin specks adrift on an immense ocean.

"Are we on the regular shipping lanes, Tom?"

"Sure. We stand a good chance of being picked up." Tom spoke in a confident tone of voice to keep up his companion's spirits, but inwardly he was far less optimistic. Any hope of being sighted by a passing ship was slim at best. If they drifted far off course, even that hope would dwindle.

"If only we'd arranged to send regular radio reports," Bud said gloomily. "Then Enterprises would be worried about our silence and start a search."

"That was part of the risk we took. To send radio messages, we'd have had to surface at regular intervals, which would have devalued our underwater survival experi-" Tom broke off suddenly. "Bud! You've just given me an idea!"

"Great-let's hear it. We can sure use one."

"Enterprises is expecting to hear signals from us," Tom declared. "At least Fearing Island is."

"Signals? You mean-"

"I mean our sound-channel testing by SO-FAR-Sound Fixing and Ranging."

"I don't get you," Bud said, puzzled. "You're talking about those underwater detonations. But they won't tell the hydrophone monitors back at the base anything about our safety. You brought the detonators to test for sound channels. If signals are picked up, the island will just assume that we've encountered channels along our course."

"I'm hoping the signals will be picked up, and that we can use the detonators for an SOS."

Bud kindled with excitement. "Genius boy, that brain of yours is twenty-four carat! Let's give it a try!"

The young inventor had brought a dozen of the small underwater detonators, set to explode at a four-thousand-foot depth. Tom had planned to drop them at wide intervals during the trip to check the location of underwater sound channels, which carry noises for thousands of miles.

Instead, he now dropped three detonators in quick succession-then three slowly-then three more in fast succession. If picked up on hydrophones, the sounds would form a crude SOS in Morse Code-dit-dit-dit, dah-dah-dah, dit-dit-dit.

"Let's hope they read us," Bud said tautly. "We can't repeat with only three left."

"I'll drop those three, too, to help them get a fix on us," Tom replied. He did so, spacing the detonations at five-minute intervals.

Bud became nervous and restless. Finally he said, "What about a midnight snack?"

Tom chuckled. "Good idea. All we need is a TV late show!"

The two hydronauts relaxed and drew liquid nourishment through their feeding tubes. Fortunately the sea

was calm, rocking the castaways gently on long rolling swells. The heavens were ablaze with stars.

“Boy, I could almost enjoy this,” Bud remarked, “if we weren’t in such a spot.”

“Same here,” Tom agreed. “This sea breeze feels great.”

An hour later the boys sighted a vertical cone of light on the western horizon. It grew larger, and soon they could make out a plane’s red and green running lights and hear its jet engines.

“The Sky Queen!” Tom cried out. “They’re using Dad’s giant searchlight!”

The hydronauts waved and shouted as the light raked the water, but it missed them by half a mile. The plane cruised past, not sighting them.

“Let’s hope they’ll be back,” Bud said.

The aircraft made two more passes over the area before finally spotting the castaways. Then it swooped in low and dropped a ladder. Atom-powered, with jet lifters for vertical take-off or hovering, the huge three-decker Sky Queen had been Tom’s first major invention. It was completely equipped for scientific research and was often referred to as the Flying Lab.

Hank Sterling, Enterprises’ blond, rugged chief trouble shooter, came aft from the controls to greet the boys as they were helped aboard.

“Thank goodness we found you!” Hank exclaimed. “Are you both okay?”

Tom heaved a sigh of relief. “We are now, but we sure sweated it out for a while. I keep thinking about that radiophoto and the message ‘Stop Tom Swift.’ They sure did!”

Word of the rescue was radioed to Enterprises as the Queen streaked back to Fearing. Harlan Ames was waiting on the island airfield. He said he would advise Thurston immediately.

“We didn’t notify your family, skipper,” Ames said. “I didn’t want to alarm them until we checked out that SOS signal.”

“Good. No need to worry them. Harlan, I certainly am disappointed about this delay in our experiment. Conditions were ideal for the crossing. They may change any time.”

Tom and Bud told the full story, revealing how puzzled they were by the whole thing. Then, exhausted, they bunked down in Tom’s laboratory apartment for a sound sleep.

Ames dropped in about ten a.m. as they were settling down to a hearty breakfast. Chow Winkler-the roly-poly Texas range cook who had become the Swifts’ private chef at Enterprises and who accompanied Tom on most of his expeditions-heaped their plates with bacon and eggs and buttered toast.

“Hank has examined all your equipment,” Ames reported.

Tom’s eyes were grim. “Sabotage?”

“Definitely. Some kind of plastic alkali capsules must have been placed in the batteries to slow down the

power and finally cut it off.”

Tom frowned. “The saboteur wanted to make sure we got far out to sea before the gear conked out.”

“But who could have done it?” Bud objected. “We checked out the suits ourselves-and they were final-inspected yesterday morning. When could anyone have tampered with them? Either it was an inside job, or else the saboteur was one of the newsmen at the press conference.”

“Right,” Ames agreed. “They were the only strangers on the island yesterday.”

Chow suddenly began to stutter and shake.

“Hey, watch it, cowboy!” Bud exclaimed. “You’re buttering your own hand instead of that extra toast!”

“B-b-brand my skillet, Tom, I know who monkeyed with your divin’ gear!” Chow blurted out.

The other three stared at him.

“Who was it?” Tom asked.

“One o’ them reporters. I was clearin’ away the dishes from that meal you an’ Bud ate yesterday mornin’, but I had to go fetch some detergent from the commissary. Like a blame fool I left the lab unlocked, an’ when I came back, I caught this varmint jest walkin’ out.”

“You’re sure he was a reporter?” Ames put in.

Chow tilted his chef’s hat and scratched his balding dome. “Well, he was wearin’ a visitor’s badge. I lit into him, an’ he acted real sorry. Said this was his first big story an’ he was jest tryin’ to impress his boss with some dope on the lab where Tom Swift works on his newfangled inventions. An’ he begged me not to get him in trouble or he might be fired.”

“So you fell for it!” Bud snorted.

Chow’s Adam’s apple bobbed miserably.

“What did he look like?” Tom asked.

The cook thought hard, then replied, “I don’t recollect exactly, but he had a mustache.”

“Shouldn’t be too hard to run down.” Ames took some folded papers out of his pocket. “I have a list here of all persons who were at the press conference. . . . Hmm. I know a lot of these chaps. As I recall, there were only three who had mustaches. I can soon check on them.”

As Ames left, Chow mumbled, “I sure am sorry, Tom, fer bein’ such a jughead.”

Tom gave him a pat. “Forget it, old-timer. I’d probably have done the same thing myself.”

Chow waddled off toward the laboratory. Bud gave him a comforting wink as he passed by.

Ames returned before the boys finished eating. “I’ve identified him, skipper. The saboteur posed as Venuto Giraud of Euro-Press-a European news agency. The real Giraud’s on assignment in Washington.

The guy who conned Chow must have been carrying faked press credentials.”

“Think you can trace him, Harlan?”

Ames shrugged. “I’ll sure try-starting with any clues in the laboratory.”

“Okay.” Tom got up from the table. “Bud and I will take off again tomorrow. Guess we’d better notify the European press that we’re behind schedule.”

“Nothing doing!” Ames snapped. “You two have been exposed to enough danger. If you’re bent on going through with this project, this time there will be a news blackout. Those fellows can wait”

“Suits me,” Tom agreed. “The only important stories, anyhow, are the complete reports we’ll be sending to the scientific journals later.”

Tom and Bud spent most of the day on the island, relaxing and preparing for their fresh takeoff the next morning. They thoroughly checked their equipment and locked it up. Later they flew back to Shopton for dinner at the Swift home.

Slender, attractive-looking Mrs. Swift tried not to show alarm over the boys’ story. Tom, who knew how his mother worried over his and Tom Sr.’s adventures, did his best to reassure her.

Danger was nothing new to the young inventor. Ever since his first clash in his Flying Lab with a gang of South American rebels bent on seizing a priceless radioactive-ore deposit, Tom had battled spies and scientific enemies in outer space and far corners of the globe. Only recently he had returned from building his amazing Repelatron Skyway over an African jungle.

After a delicious fried chicken dinner, Tom and Bud were watching television in the living room when the announcement special news bulletin appeared on the screen and a voice cut in:

“According to a news flash just received, the ocean liner S.S. Centurion has sunk in the mid-Atlantic. A mysterious explosion aboard caused the sinking. The ship was carrying gold bullion destined for Fort Knox. It was also bringing to this country the statue known as the Delian Apollo. The world-famous art treasure was being loaned to the United States for a special exhibit. Details on the sinking are not yet available, but all passengers and crew are reported to have been rescued. The gold and the art treasure, however, went down.”

Bud whistled in awe. “Wow! What a loss I” Tom exclaimed excitedly, “Bud, this explains that weird radiophoto that baffled the CIA!”

## CHAPTER 111

### CHOW WINKLER, DETECTIVE

MR. Swift had gone to his study after dinner to consult some engineering texts. He was just returning to

the living room when he heard the TV news flash, followed by Bud's and Tom's remarks.

"What radiophoto, son?" Mr. Swift inquired.

Tom explained about the drawing of the Roman soldier and the message in code. "Guess I should have told you before, but I didn't want to worry you and Mother."

Tom Sr., trim and athletic, with the same keen features and deep-set blue eyes as Tom Jr., smiled as he sat down. "I understand. But what's the connection with this ship sinking?"

"Dad, I have a hunch that the picture of that drowning Roman soldier may have stood for the S.S. Centurion! And the people who perpetrated the crime wanted to keep me from being in the vicinity."

"Hmm." Mr. Swift frowned thoughtfully. "A centurion was a Roman military officer-that fits, all right. Which implies that the sender knew beforehand the ship was doomed."

"Sure, because he or they had planted a bomb aboard," Tom reasoned. "And the radiophoto could have been a signal that arrangements had been carried out to sink her."

"Jumpin' jets!" Bud burst out. "I'll bet you're on to something, genius boy!"

Mr. Swift rubbed his jaw as he considered the problem. "Tom, this is a deadly serious business. I think you should pass on your theory to the Central Intelligence Agency."

"I'll do it right now." Tom went to the telephone and placed a long-distance call to John Thurston. The young inventor explained his theory that the drawing of the drowning Roman might have been a tip-off on the Centurion explosion.

"Tom, that's the best lead we've had yet!" Thurston said tensely. "We'll work on that angle. In the meantime, you and Bud be especially careful."

Tom replied, "When we take off tomorrow, it'll be in secret."

Presently Sandy joined the boys. The three teen-agers joked and chatted for a while until Tom and Bud decided to start back to Fearing Island.

"So soon?" Sandy made a face. "It's not even eight o'clock yet."

Tom grinned. "Can't miss our beauty sleep, Sis, if we expect to be in shape tomorrow."

Just as the boys were leaving, the telephone rang.

"For you, Tom-it's Chow," Sandy reported.

"Boss, I think mebbe I've spotted that fake reporter!" the Texan babbled excitedly. "You know-Venutie Gyro, or whatever his name is!"

"You mean the one with the mustache who posed as Giraud?" Tom was instantly alert. "What's up, Chow? Where are you calling from?"

"Can't explain now, but I'm at that classy French restaurant, the Trianon. Hustle here fast, boss, 'cause

the varmint may leave soon!”

Tom heard the receiver click. He related Chow’s message to the others, then took off in his low-slung silver sports car with Bud.

Meanwhile, Chow hurried back to his table and sat fidgeting impatiently. His quarry—a wiry, muscular-looking man with a mustache and dark glasses—was seated some distance away with two companions. Chow craned for a better look, but his view was partly blocked. He could see the man only in profile.

“Brand my turkey giblets, they’ve finished their dossen!” the Texan fretted. “I’ve gotta get a squint at that hombre’s face! They’ll be gone before Tom gets here!”

“Monsieur is enjoying his crepes suzette?”

“Huh?” Chow looked up with a start and saw a waiter hovering at his shoulder. “Oh-er-sure, sure! Tastes great.” Chow reached for more sauce to put over the sweetened pancakes, but instead he absent-mindedly picked up the vinegar and proceeded to pour it on lavishly.

The waiter raised his eyebrows, shrugged expressively, and moved away.

The man in dark glasses and his two companions were now dabbing their lips with napkins as if about to leave. In desperation, Chow got up and headed toward the suspect’s table, intending to walk boldly past for a close look. But as he approached, the man suddenly turned around to speak to someone at the table behind him. The Texan could see little more than the back of the man’s head.

“I should’ve stayed put,” thought Chow. “Could’ve seen him perfect.”

Fuming, he returned to his own table, then saw that the suspect was now facing his dinner companions.

“Make up your mind, buster!” Chow steamed.

Once more, Chow started toward his quarry’s table. Several diners looked annoyed as the pudgy, bowlegged cowpoke maneuvered his bay window past their chairs for the third time. Again, as Chow approached, the mustached man turned around to resume chatting with the person behind him!

Chow’s face was now perspiring furiously. The man’s companions—one a woman, the other a burly, fat-faced fellow—stared up at him.

“You looking for someone, friend?” the burly man asked in a needling voice.

“Mebbe I am an’ mebbe I ain’t,” Chow snarled. He walked slowly past, peering back over his shoulder in hope that the mustached man would turn around again.

Crash! A trayful of dishes and silver went flying in all directions as Chow collided with a waiter. Chow staggered back from the impact, tripped over a diner’s foot, and fell flat onto the floor.

“Norn d’un nom!” the waiter wailed in anguish.

“Haw, haw, haw!” The burly man roared with glee. “That’s what happens when you don’t watch where you’re going, fat boy!”

“Now jest a cotton-pickin’ minute, you smart aleck!” Chow struggled to his feet, with salad dressing oozing down over his head and face. “If it’s trouble you’re lookin’ for-“

The mustached man suddenly rose from his chair and exclaimed, “Shut up and wipe off your face, you loudmouthed range bum!”

“Range bum!” Roaring with rage, Chow mopped the salad dressing from his eyes and tried to focus on his enemy. “Take off them glasses, an’ I’ll show you who’s a range bum, mister!”

At that moment Tom and Bud were speeding into downtown Shopton. Arriving at the Trianon, they parked at the curb and hurried inside. The restaurant was in an uproar. Most of the diners had left their tables and were crowding around the far end of the room. Loud grunts and exclamations could be heard.

“That’s the stuff, baldy!” one of the onlookers called out. “You’ve got him now!”

“Good grief, what’s going on?” Tom gasped. “Does he mean Chow?”

The two boys squirmed through the crowd, then stopped in amazement. Chow and a mustached man were seated at a table, sleeves rolled up and engaged in an Indian wrestling contest! Both their faces were beaded with perspiration.

Suddenly Chow forced his opponent’s arm to the table and crowed in triumph, “Gotcha, Dude!”

“Okay, cowboy-you win.”

Just then Chow caught sight of Tom and Bud. “Hi, buckaroos!” he bellowed. “Step up an’ meet Dude Tyler, former Indian-rasslin’ champ o’ Brazos County, Texas!”

Grinning, the boys shook hands with the mustached man.

“But-er-what about that fellow you wanted me to see, Chow?” Tom inquired.

Chow gave an embarrassed chuckle. “It was jest my ole range pal, Dude, only I didn’t reco’nize him behind them cheaters-an’ also he’s growed a mustache since I seen him last.”

As the crowd returned to their tables, Tom and Bud found chairs and sat down with Chow, Dude Tyler, and Dude’s two companions, one of whom turned out to be Mrs. Tyler. Chow produced an empty matchbook bearing the Trianon Restaurant’s imprint, and began explaining his mistake.

“Found this matchbook in the lab while you was eatin’ breakfast,” Chow told the boys. “Later I figgered that fake reporter Ames was talkin’ about must ‘a’ dropped it an’ I-well-I felt so low-down over bein’ took in by that sidewinder that I decided to-“

“-to play private eye.” Bud winked at Tom.

“Yup, I figgered he might hang out at this caffay,” Chow admitted sheepishly. “Thought I had him spotted, but it turned out to be jest Dude.”

“The matchbook might be a lead at that, though there’s not much chance of getting prints off it now.” Tom slipped it into his pocket and added with a chuckle, “Great try, old-timer, but after this maybe



you'd better leave the detecting to Harlan Ames."

The boys soon excused themselves, leaving Chow happily swapping reminiscences with his friend.

"That headwaiter looked as if he'd like to brain Chow with a leg of lamb!" Bud remarked to Tom as they left the restaurant. Both boys shook with laughter.

Early the next morning the two hydronauts took off again on their Atlantic crossing-this time with only the base personnel watching as they submerged.

Tom was determined to make as fast time as possible, so the boys cruised with their ion jets at "full throttle." Hours passed with little or no conversation over the mikes of their sonarphones as they sped along, weightless and relaxed, through the green undersea world of inner space.

In midafternoon Bud suddenly signaled, "Take a look at your scope, Tom!"

The young inventor glanced at his wrist sonar-scope. A strange blip showed on the screen.

"Too big for a sub, isn't it?" Bud queried.

Tom agreed. "I'd say it's definitely more than one object. Might be a school of fish."

Alert but curious, the boys maintained their course. Soon they could make out a number of large dark creatures swimming straight toward them. Tom's eyes widened in fear.

"Killer whales, Bud!" he warned over his suit mike. "The most dangerous things we could meet underwater!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SINGING MERMAN

THERE appeared to be at least a dozen monsters in the pack. The killers were black on top and whitish below-the colors slit by their wide, ferocious-looking mouths.

"What's the drill, Tom?" Bud asked tensely.

"A squirt of nigrosine-then dive fast!"

As he spoke, Tom plucked from his belt an explosive plastic cartridge with a tiny plunger at one end. He aimed the cartridge toward the approaching killer whales and pressed the plunger. A high-speed stream of blue-black dye jetted from the front end and spread through the water in an inky cloud.

"Get below, Bud!" Tom ordered.

Flicking their density controls, the hydronauts shot downward to a depth of four hundred feet.

“Now what?” Bud queried.

“Evasive action,” Tom replied. “Follow me!”

For the next few minutes the boys zigzagged back and forth like darting trout, but managed to maintain roughly their original northeasterly course. Finally, after a glance at his sonarscope screen, Tom switched off both his drive jet and his sonar pulse and told Bud to do the same for ten minutes.

The boys floated motionless in the murky green depths. At last Tom switched on his sonarscope again, and after studying his screen, signaled all clear.

“Those babies have sharp hearing,” he explained over the sonarphone. “They would have homed in on us easily if they’d detected any sound-and I’m not sure we could have outrun them.”

“They weren’t as big as most whales I’ve read about,” Bud said.

“Only thirty feet long,” Tom said dryly. “But that ‘killer’ tag is no joke, Bud. They like to bite chunks out of the bigger whales, and they swallow seals whole.”

“Whew! Let’s be glad we’re not seals!”

“Don’t forget, our special sonar pulse makes us sound like porpoises-and they love those, too.” Tom grinned at the stunned grunt Bud gave. “In fact, they’re one of the largest beasts of prey, and I doubt if they’re very choosy about what kind of meat they go after.”

“They’re welcome to anything around,” Bud responded, “as long as it isn’t us.”

Tom took the opportunity to check their position on his automatic navigator, which had been miniaturized around an advanced nuclear gyroscope. Then the hydronauts switched on their ion-drive jets and resumed their across-the-ocean swim.

Some time later the young inventor glanced at his luminous watch dial. “What say we start our sleeping routine now, Bud?” he queried over his sonarphone. “The more rest we get, the better we’ll endure our days under water.”

“Okay with me,” Bud replied. “Who’ll stand the first trick?”

“You can log the first sack time. I’m probably a bit too keyed up to drop off just yet.”

The boys hooked themselves together with their nylon towline. Then Tom maneuvered himself into a lead position while Bud relaxed comfortably and closed his eyes.

“Boy, it’s like sleeping in a cradle,” the copilot murmured. “I feel light as a feather.”

Presently came the sound of Bud crooning himself to sleep with an original tune. Tom chuckled as the refrain filtered through his earphones: “Oh, rock me to sleep With a song of the deep, The Lullaby of Fishland!”

The planned routine was two hours’ sleep for one hydronaut, followed by an hour with both awake; then

two hours' sleep for his partner and another hour of companionship. Thus, each would enjoy eight hours of rest out of every twenty-four, with no undue strain on either boy's powers of alertness.

By the time Tom woke up Bud, the water had darkened to a somber gray-green. And an hour later, when the young inventor took his own rest period, almost all traces of light had vanished.

Bud amused himself by watching the fish that glided, blinking and gaping, past the yellow beam of his lamp. One that made him gasp was an enormous oval sunfish over seven feet long.

"Boy! Chow could feed a ship's crew on that baby!" Bud thought.

The night passed slowly. Unaccustomed yet to their watch routine, each hydronaut felt lonesome as he jetted along through the eerie undersea darkness with his partner trailing behind, asleep, at the end of the towline.

The following morning, during one of the hours with both awake, the boys became tense as they detected an object on their scopes. It was approaching at high speed from the rear. They proceeded cautiously, alert for possible trouble, as it overhauled them. Tom breathed a sigh of relief when he made out its blimp-shaped hull, diving planes, and slim, knifelike conning tower.

"Relax, Bud, it's a U.S. Navy nuke!" Tom signaled.

"Wonder where she's headed?" Bud replied. "Do you suppose they've spotted us yet?"

Inside the nuclear submarine, the hydrophone operator was monitoring the boys' conversation with a puzzled look. "Thought it was a couple of porpoises at first, sir," he reported to the skipper, "but that squeal I'm getting sounds like some sort of sonar carrier wave."

"Try the Gertrude," the captain ordered.

The enlisted man switched on the underwater telephone as the captain issued commands to slow the ship for a sonarscope search. Presently all hands stared in amazement, eyes popping, as a voice from outside came over the speaker:

"This is your Singing Merman, coming to you over the Atlantic Network. Our tortoise trio, assisted by the Ollie Octopus combo, will now render that popular Southern Blues number, 'Away Down Yonder with Davy Jones'!"

A droning one-man rendition followed, pepped up with assorted instrument imitations. Red-faced, the captain strode to the underwater telephone and barked into the mike, "Captain Frost speaking. Who's out there? What's going on?"

Tom could not help laughing as he visualized the amazed reaction inside the submarine to Bud's joke. He waved his pal to silence, then replied, "Sorry, sir. I apologize for the nonsense. This is Tom Swift Jr. and that Singing Merman you heard was my pal, Bud Barclay. We're one day out of Fearing Island, en route to Southampton, England, in electronic hydrolung suits."

The response from the sub was a roar of good-natured mirth. "Apology accepted-but Merman really had us going for a while," the skipper said. "I'm Captain Frost of the U.S.S. Trident, out of Norfolk, bound for Scotland. Care to come aboard and visit?"

Tom declined, in order not to affect his and Bud's underwater survival experiment. Instead, a frogman emerged from the Trident to inspect and marvel at the two hydronauts. Later, after an exchange of good wishes, the submarine proceeded on its way, heading on a somewhat more northerly course than Tom and Bud were following.

By their third day at sea, the boys felt well attuned to their fishlike existence and went to a lower depth. As they cruised along that afternoon, they noticed a sonar blip which painted almost their whole scopes but narrowed toward the top.

"What is it? Some sort of geological formation?" Bud queried.

"Must be," Tom guessed, "Probably an underwater volcano or a seamount."

Presently, through the greenish murk, a huge dim mass loomed ahead, apparently rearing upward from the ocean floor.

"Hey! Aren't those lights on top?" Bud signaled.

"Sure looks that way." Tiny halos of yellow radiance could be seen, but they were too high up and at too great a distance for the boys to make out the source. "Let's investigate," Tom added cautiously. "But don't use your lamp or your undersea-light switch just yet."

The hydronauts glided forward. Gradually Tom became aware of a strange, tingling sensation. It grew stronger by the moment. Suddenly Tom realized that a myriad of fishes were swarming in the same direction!

A sense of danger flashed through the young inventor's mind when he suddenly felt giddy and disoriented. The tingling numbness fogged his brain. With a terrific effort Tom veered course.

"Bud, stop!" he warned over his sonarphone. "Don't go any farther or you'll be electrocuted!"

But Bud gave no sign of heeding Tom's warning. He jetted ahead at top speed!

## CHAPTER V

### DEADLY TRAWLER

"BUD!" Tom yelled again. No use-Bud obviously was too dazed from shock to respond. In seconds he might be beyond help I

Tom hesitated only for an instant. Then, reckless of his own danger, the young inventor plunged in pursuit. Bud was far ahead by now-perhaps too far to reach in time. Tom gunned his own jet to the limit.

Again Tom felt the strange, tingling sensation. His brain was reeling dizzily-all sense of time and place seemed to be slipping away.

“I mustn’t lose consciousness!” Tom told himself. “If I don’t keep control of my wits, we’re both goners!”

Soon he was close enough to reach out and grab Bud by the belt. The husky copilot kicked and flailed his arms wildly. The resistance of the water gave a dreamy, slow-motion effect to the struggle. Tom managed to swivel himself and Bud around so that they were turned in a safe direction, then clung doggedly to Bud as they jetted away from the danger zone.

Presently the tingling sensation in Tom’s brain was almost gone. In a few moments he cut his own jet and succeeded in switching Bud’s ion-drive unit to a frothing halt.

“Wh-what happened?” Bud demanded woozily. “Was I having raptures of the deep or something?”

“You’d have been playing a harp in another minute or so,” Tom told him. “You were heading straight into water with enough electrical current to knock a whale silly!”

The young inventor pointed toward the huge volcanic formation. It was now partly hidden from view by swarming fish of all sizes-mackerel, cod, herring, tunny, even a few dolphins and sharks. All were swimming frantically in the same direction, moving gradually upward as if into a narrowing, invisible funnel.

“I d-don’t get it,” Bud stammered in confusion.

“There’s an electric deep-sea fishing rig suspended up there in the water somewhere-it’s the only answer,” Tom said. “The fish are drawn helplessly to the electrode by a process called electrotaxis. When they get close enough, they’re electrocuted and sucked up through a pipe to the fishing vessel. We were too dazed to notice.”

“Do you mean we’d have gone up the spout with the fish?”

Tom shrugged. “Probably-I’m glad we didn’t find out. Our jets might have carried us within the pull of the intake suction.”

“S-s-sufferin’ seals!” Bud shuddered at the thought of their narrow escape. “I’ll bet I was dazed enough. If it hadn’t been for you, pal, I’ll bet that trawler would have landed its first California pilot fish by now I”

“What a fish story that would have made,” Tom remarked with a grin. Suddenly he exclaimed, “Bud! Those lights on the seamount have vanished!”

“Well, I’ll be an oyster’s uncle! We weren’t seeing things before, were we?”

“We saw lights and no mistake,” Tom retorted. “Let’s try for another look!”

The fish, or what was left of the swarming shoal, were now dispersing as if the electric fishing rig had been turned off or withdrawn from the water. In order not to take any risks, Tom and Bud circled widely and approached the undersea formation from a different direction.

Once more the boys felt the same tingling sensation, and again fish began to swarm past them!

“Veer off, Bud!” Tom warned. “Let’s not get caught twice by the same trick!”

When the hydronauts were safely out of range again, Bud shot his pal a puzzled look. “You said trick, Tom. Are you implying that someone’s giving us the underwater hotfoot on purpose?”

“Just a hunch, but I’d almost bet on it,” Tom said grimly. “The usual electric fishing rig has an effective current range of about eighty feet, but the gear we’re up against must be tremendously more powerful. If the trawler’s stationed up there to guard the seamount, that would explain why.”

Bud glanced at the direction in which the fish were swimming, then frowned angrily. “You must be right. They moved the gear to intercept our new approach.”

“Sure, they’re probably tracking us on sonar.”

“But how did they get wise to us in the first place? With our own search pulses, we sound like porpoises on their hydrophones.”

“Our sonarphone conversation probably gave us away,” Tom reasoned. He added ruefully, “Too bad our suits have no antidetection equipment. We had to ditch that to carry our liquid nourishment and all the other necessary paraphernalia for our trip.”

“So what do we do now?” Bud asked.

“Get going. There’s not much else we can do.” Tom paused to check the exact location of the seamount on his automatic navigator. “But I’m sure coming back as soon as possible in the Sea Hound, Bud, and find out what cooks around here.”

The Sea Hound was a revolutionary flying submarine in which Tom had explored a sunken city of gold and discovered a valuable undersea helium deposit.

The hydronauts switched on their ion-drive jets and resumed their journey. Soon they relaxed in the soothing monotony of hydrospace travel.

“I’ll be glad to get out of this suit and breathe some fresh English air,” said Bud, flexing his arms and legs for exercise.

“Me too,” said Tom.

The next two days passed uneventfully, except for a brief sighting of a giant squid. The fearsome-looking creature disappeared into the gloomy depths below as the boys approached, waving its huge tentacles.

“That’s the kind of critter sperm whales feed on,” Tom remarked.

“A king-sized stomachache, if you ask me,” Bud replied nervously.

Tom chuckled. “Those squid don’t go down any too easily, even when a whale’s doing the snacking. A lot of sperms that are caught show the scars of their tentacles.”

Early in the morning on the sixth day after taking off from Fearing Island, Tom and Bud made their way jubilantly into the English Channel. The waters thrummed with the distant noises of ships’ propeller screws.

“We’re almost there I” Bud exclaimed.

As they approached the Isle of Wight, the boys exchanged greetings with a British submarine, which promptly radioed the news of their arrival to ships and shore stations. The sub escorted them through The Solent into Southampton water. The boys had accomplished their nonstop swim under the Atlantic!

When the hydronauts finally surfaced, they were greeted by a deafening chorus of tugboat whistles, ships’ sirens, and the excited yells of sailors and passengers lining the rails of vessels in the harbor.

Tom and Bud were stunned by the reception. Shouts and waves from one of the piers showed them where they were expected to land. The boys headed toward what was clearly a welcoming committee on the quayside and were helped ashore by a tangle of eager arms and hands.

“The Borough of Southampton welcomes you to England after your magnificent achievement!” announced a dignified-looking official. “We had word from Mr. Swift that you probably would arrive today.” His words were almost drowned by the cheers and exclamations of the throng.

“Wow! Looks as though we’ve really made the big time!” Bud muttered to Tom as they stripped off their hoods.

Shutters clicked frantically and TV cameras trained on the two heroes. Microphones were held out to catch their answers to the barrage of questions fired at them from every direction.

“How do you feel, boys?”

“What was your first reaction as you came up?”

“Did you both come through in good shape?”

“How about saying hello to the television audience?”

Tom grinned. “Hi! Glad we made it. We’re both fine, but-well, frankly we had no idea we’d receive such an all-out welcome.”

A loud outburst of cheers and laughs greeted his words, and the borough dignitary said, “We British have always admired great feats of exploration and adventure, and we feel that your sub-Atlantic crossing-entirely alone and unescorted-represents a milestone in man’s conquest of the ocean I”

Again the air rang with cheers.

It took more than half an hour for the hydronauts to escape from the welcoming crowd. Then Tom and Bud were driven through streets decked with bunting to a hotel, where new tailor-made suits of clothing and other accessories had been provided by enthusiastic English merchants.

“Perfect fit, too!” Bud crowed as he inspected himself in front of a mirror.

“Harlan must have cabled our measurements,” Tom said, a bit embarrassed.

By the time the boys had changed, a helicopter had arrived to whisk them off to London for a second, even bigger reception.

“Hmm. I don’t see any brass bands waiting,” Bud remarked as the helicopter touched down.

To the surprise of Tom and Bud, the trio of officials that came striding across the tarmac to greet them were extremely stern-faced.

“How do you do?” Tom said politely. “I take it you gentlemen are the-er-reception committee we’re supposed to meet?”

“All plans have been changed!” one of the officials snapped. “The welcoming ceremonies have been held up while we investigate a reported fraud you two chaps are said to have perpetrated.” “Fraud!” Bud exclaimed. “What fraud?”

“I’m referring to your so-called underwater crossing of the Atlantic Ocean,” was the reply.

## CHAPTER VI

### TOM SWIFT’S DOUBLE

FOR a moment, Tom and Bud were too thunderstruck at the official’s words to speak. Then Tom reddened angrily. Although he cared little about the welcoming ceremonies, the young inventor was concerned about the reputation of Swift Enterprises.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘so-called underwater crossing,’” Tom gritted, “but if you’re implying that we-“

One of the other officials spoke up nervously, “Perhaps we should discuss this matter in private-out of the public eye. I suggest we go inside.”

Police were on hand to restrain any newsmen, but several reporters dodged past and came rushing toward the helicopter. The tight-lipped officials ignored them and escorted the boys to a room in the airport terminal. Here the official who had spoken first introduced himself as Inspector Raeburn of Scotland Yard.

“We regret that this interrogation should be necessary,” he said, “but you two have been accused of faking your underwater exploit. However, we’re eager to hear your side of the story.”

“We’ve heard no story as yet,” Tom retorted. “Suppose you tell us who made this charge.”

Raeburn harrumphed and fingered his bristling, sandy mustache. “I’m afraid it’s against policy to reveal the names of informers,” he said. “Briefly, we’ve received a tip that you two reappeared in the town of Shopton, U.S.A., the day after your highly publicized take-off. The informer claims that you later embarked in a Swift submarine and made the crossing that way- emerging from the sub just off the English Channel.”

Tom and Bud looked at each other, both thinking the same thing. Ames’s news blackout had certainly



put them in an awkward position!

“We did turn back after our first start because our gear had been sabotaged,” Tom admitted. “That’s why we were seen in Shopton. The second time we took off, we had no publicity, for fear of another attempt on our lives.”

The three officials looked skeptical.

“It’s a fact!” Bud growled. “On our first start, someone had sabotaged our suit batteries. We came near drowning! Tom had been warned that someone might try to stop him.”

“As for our making the crossing in a sub,” Tom added, “that charge is completely untrue.”

“Do you have any proof?” one of Raeburn’s companions inquired quietly.

Suddenly Bud burst out, “Wait! Maybe we can prove it. Has the U.S.S. Trident arrived at the nuclear submarine base in Scotland yet?”

Raeburn frowned. “Hmm. I read that one put in yesterday. May have been the Trident. Why?”

“Because she passed us and we spoke with her. The captain even sent out a frogman to see us.”

Raeburn and the other two officials looked impressed. A telephone call was hastily put through to the submarine base at Holy Loch. In a few minutes Captain Frost was on the line.

“Were those boys in a sub?” he echoed, then roared with laughter. “I’ll tell the world they weren’t! I can send you some movie footage our frogman took of them with an underwater camera.”

Raeburn’s face was stiff with embarrassment as he hung up. “That-er-certainly disposes of any charges of fakery,” he mumbled. “Please accept our apologies for this frightful mistake.”

Tom, however, was still concerned over the charge. “Captain Frost can’t confirm our whole trip,” he pointed out. “Unless we can verify all five days of the crossing, some people may go on believing we faked part of it.”

Suddenly a loud altercation was heard outside the door. Then a plump little man burst into the room. His shiny bald head was fringed with a wild tangle of hair. “It’s outrageous! Shocking! Disgraceful!” he stormed. “What’s the meaning of this high-handed nonsense?”

“Dr. Frobisher!” Tom exclaimed joyfully.

Catching sight of the two boys, the plump man rushed toward them. “My dear Tom! And you too, Barclay! What can I say, what can I do to make amends for this intolerable insult!”

“Bud, this is Dr. Terence Frobisher, one of the world’s greatest oceanographers,” Tom said.

Dr. Frobisher whirled around to face the three perspiring, scarlet-faced officials. “Are you all such blithering idiots that you don’t know the name ‘Swift’ stands for the very highest integrity and scientific achievement—that these two lads were the first to conquer space and probe the deepest ocean floor? And you have the unmitigated effrontery to accuse them of fraud!”

“A most unfortunate mistake, sir,” Inspector Raeburn said hastily. “It’s all straight now.”

“Not quite,” said Tom. “Dr. Frobisher, our hydrolung suits contain instruments for recording water temperature, salinity, and other data. They were running continuously after we took off from Fearing. Would you please examine them? Our suits are in the helicopter.”

“I’d consider it an honor.”

Half an hour later, Dr. Frobisher reported, “There’s not the slightest doubt that these boys have been under water for fully five days!”

After further apologies from the three officials, Tom and Bud consented to go through with the welcoming ceremonies. Phone calls were made to alert the proper authorities. Then the boys were driven to the London Guildhall where the Lord Mayor, in full regalia, presented them with the key to the city before cheering throngs.

An official luncheon followed, with many toasts and speeches. Television appearances and other lionizing events had been planned, but Tom and Bud politely begged off, saying they were in need of rest. The boys finally managed to get away in a taxi.

“Whew!” Bud gasped wearily. “Crossing the Atlantic’s a breeze compared to all that fuss and feathers. A few more speeches and I’d have conked out right on the banquet table 1”

“Same here,” Tom confessed. At the hotel where rooms had been reserved for them, he inquired about their luggage.

“Safe and sound, sir. It was sent here instead of to Southampton,” the desk clerk informed Tom as the boys signed the register. “By the way, two young ladies are waiting to see you.”

A girl’s voice giggled behind them. “We’ve heard so-o-o much about you two heroes, we just had to meet you in person 1”

Tom and Bud spun around. “Sandy! Phyl!”

Blond Sandra Swift and dark-haired Phyllis Newton laughed delightedly at the boys’ surprise. The two seventeen-year-old girls looked pretty as pictures in their smart summer suits.

“When did you two hit town?” Bud demanded.

“We flew in yesterday,” Phyl explained.

“Well, well! Small world!” Tom said with a pleased grin.

“This is great!” Bud exclaimed. “Now we can all take in London together!”

“For a day or so, anyhow,” Tom added.

“A day or so?” Sandy echoed in dismay. “But Phyl and I thought you’d be free for a real holiday now that your project’s over.”

“We have to go back and examine an underwater formation we saw,” Tom said.

“Oh, Tom! Must you?” Sandy showed her disappointment. “Back home, you two are always too busy for dates. And now, after we purposely timed this vacation trip so that we could sightsee together, you’re going off and leaving us.”

Tom chuckled and patted her hand. “Don’t take it too hard, Sis. We’ll be going by seacopter, so maybe we can join you later for a few days.”

The two boys excused themselves to freshen up. In their hotel room Tom placed a hurried transatlantic call to Harlan Ames at Enterprises.

“Good show, chaps!” Ames quipped. “We saw your arrival at Southampton relayed over TV.”

“You missed half the fun,” Tom retorted wryly. He told of their interrogation at London Airport. Ames was indignant and promised to try to find out, through security authority and Interpol channels to Scotland Yard, the name of the tipster who had accused the boys of faking.

Tom also related their adventure with the mysterious electric trawler. He asked Ames to dispatch the Sea Hound to England. The security chief promised that the seacopter would be at London Airport the following afternoon.

After returning to the hotel lobby, Tom and Bud took a stroll through Hyde Park with the girls and then stopped in a tearoom.

“By the way, Tom,” said Phyl with a smile, “we saw you in London yesterday.”

“Yesterday? But we just got here.” Tom looked puzzled. “You mean on a TV newscast?”

“Oh, no-in person. We even touched you, but you ignored us.” Sandy grinned teasingly.

“Okay, what’s the gag?” Bud asked.

“It’s no gag-it’s the truth,” Sandy insisted. “Of course he must have been an impostor-or a double-if you’re positive you didn’t land till today. Maybe we should go back to that place and see if he’s still around.”

“That’s a deal.” Tom laughed. “You’ve got us too intrigued to leave us dangling in suspense.”

The four young people hailed a taxi, and Sandy whispered something to the driver.

“Righto, miss.” The Cockney driver grinned. “Fair give ‘em the shudders, that place will!”

A short time later the taxi drew up before a building in Marylebone Road which bore a sign: London wax museum.

“The wax museum!” Tom burst out laughing. “You mean I’m in there?”

“Why not? You’re famous!” Phyl said.

After buying tickets, they went into a dimly lighted gallery filled with eerily lifelike figures. Among them were Winston Churchill, various British monarchs, Adolf Hitler, Charles Dickens, Admiral Nelson dying

on the deck of his flagship, Marie Antoinette about to be guillotined, and a blood-chilling assortment of famous criminals.

“That taxi driver wasn’t kidding!” Bud muttered.

Presently they stopped short before a youth with a crew cut, dressed in a space suit, and holding an astronaut’s helmet.

“Hey! It’s you, Tom!” Bud gasped. “They must have just put this in.”

“Good grief!” Tom murmured. “What a weird feeling to meet yourself face to face!”

A little boy who was visiting the museum with his parents suddenly recognized Tom. “Look! There’s the real Tom Swift!” he squealed. “I saw him on the telly this morning!”

Soon the young inventor and his companions were surrounded by a knot of admirers. The gray-haired proprietor of the museum came bustling out to greet them.

“It is indeed an honor to be visited by one of our most popular attractions!” the proprietor said, shaking hands. He stepped back, cocked his head, and compared the statue to Tom. “Not bad, sir, if I may say so, considering it was done from photographs.”

“Looks so real it’s startling,” Tom said.

The proprietor’s eyes gleamed. “Would you care to have it?”

Tom’s eyebrows lifted in surprise. “You mean to take back to America?”

“Exactly. If you and Mr. Barclay would be kind enough to let yourselves be modeled from life, the present wax figure is yours to keep!”

After some coaxing by the girls, Tom and Bud agreed to come to the museum the next morning so clay casts could be made of their features.

“Splendid!” The owner beamed. “I’ll have this one sent to you as soon as we close today!”

The four young Americans managed to squeeze in a little more sightseeing, including a visit to the Tower of London and a look at the red-coated sentries outside Buckingham Palace. Then they returned to their hotel for dinner.

As they were enjoying a hearty meal of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Sandy suddenly exclaimed, “Look, Phyl! Here comes that fellow we met on the plane!”

A tall, thin, rather hatchet-faced young man of about thirty was walking toward their table. His black hair was slicked down over his skull. He was clutching an attache case.

“How nice to see you again, Miss Swift-and Miss Newton!”

The girls smiled politely, and Sandy introduced him to the boys. “Mr. Tristan Carlow . . . this is my brother, Tom, and Bud Barclay.”

After shaking hands, Carlow pulled up a chair and sat down, uninvited. “Frankly, Mr. Swift, I’ve been hoping to meet you,” he said. “I have a proposition that will make your fortune. If you’ll just look at my new undersea invention-“

He opened his attache case and started to pull out some blueprints. Tom tried to hide his disinterest, while Bud plainly looked bored.

Just then a brass-buttoned pageboy came into the dining room. “Paging Mr. Tom Swift!”

Tom beckoned him over.

“Cablegram, sir.” The boy held out a tray.

Tom tipped him, opened the message, and read it. The cablegram was from Harlan Ames:

INFORMER WHO ACCUSED YOU OF FRAUD IS AMERICAN ENGINEER NAMED TRISTAN CARLOW.

## CHAPTER VII

### A TRANSATLANTIC CALL

TOM seethed with anger. So Tristan Carlow was the informer who had caused the two hydronauts such embarrassment! The young inventor repressed an impulse to reach across the table and shove the cablegram in Carlow’s face. “Better wait and hear him out,” Tom decided. “It might be worthwhile to learn what the fellow’s up to now.”

Bud and the girls were curious about the cablegram, but they tactfully refrained from asking any questions. Apparently Carlow, too, was curious, judging from his expression.

“Sorry for the interruption, Mr. Carlow,” Tom said impassively. “Please go on.”

“Right! Now then, I’ve perfected an undersea television device capable of revealing objects at any depth,” Carlow resumed in a loud, confident voice. “You realize what this means?”

“I’m not sure I do,” Tom said, keeping his face a blank. “Suppose you tell me.”

“Why, the device will be invaluable in ship salvage work! With my invention, it will be possible to pinpoint any wreck in any ocean of the world!” Carlow’s pale, bulging eyes shone with excitement. “There’s not a sunken treasure anywhere on the sea floor that can stay hidden from my underwater camera!”

“And where do I come in?” Tom asked.

“Mr. Swift, I’m proposing that Swift Enterprises form a partnership with me to exploit this amazing

device. I've been trying to arouse government interest in Washington, but the fools are too blind to realize its full possibilities. You're different-you have vision." Carlow paused to let his words sink in, then added impressively, "At a conservative estimate, our profits should run into the millions!"

"I see." Tom took out the cablegram and handed it to Carlow. "Since you're inviting Swift Enterprises into a partnership, maybe you can explain why you tried to ruin our reputation by accusing Bud and me of faking our sea crossing."

Bud and the girls gasped. Carlow's face went sickly pale, then flamed as he read the cable.

"I-I realize wh-what you must think," Carlow stammered. "But at the time I felt my actions were justified. You see, I was in Shopton and saw you coming out of a restaurant the day after your take-off. Since there was no news that the project had been canceled, I jumped to the conclusion that you were trying to deceive the public. I assumed you took off later by submarine. Now I realize I misjudged you. I do apologize."

"Very well. I accept your apology," Tom said, but secretly he mistrusted the man.

"Wonderful! Then we can get down to business. Now if you'll just look over these drawings-" Carlow held out his sheaf of blueprints eagerly.

But Tom shook his head. "Sorry, I'm afraid we're not interested. Swift Enterprises already has ample equipment for probing the ocean floor. And to avoid any risk of a patent infringement suit later, I'd prefer not to see your plans."

"A patent infringement suit?" Carlow looked shocked. "But that's unthinkable! I can trust you not to steal my idea!"

"Thanks, but I'm still not interested."

Carlow got to his feet, trembling with anger as he stuffed his drawings back into his attache case. "So that's your attitude!" he snarled. "I might have known the great Tom Swift was too fatheaded and egotistical to admit that anyone else might come up with a good invention!"

"Simmer down, mister," Bud said quietly.

Carlow's face contorted with rage. He clenched his fist as if he might punch Bud-but after noting Bud's husky build, Carlow appeared to think better of such a move.

"You'll regret treating me this way, Swift!" he rasped. "I'm warning you-you'll regret it!" Then he strode off and left the dining room.

"What an unpleasant person!" Phyl shuddered.

"He sure is," Tom agreed. "But let's not let him spoil our dinner."

Later, after the boys retired early to their room for a long night's rest, a call informed Tom that a crate had arrived from the wax museum. Tom was about to ask that it be held in the hotel trunk room. Then he changed his mind.

"Have it sent up, please." As he replaced the receiver, Tom remarked to Bud with a grin, "I'd like

another look at my double.”

When the boys opened the crate, they found that the figure was now clothed in sport shirt and slacks. A note from the museum proprietor explained that he wanted to keep the astronaut costume for the new figure and hoped Tom would not mind.

“Wow! Sure looks lifelike!” Bud remarked.

Next morning, as they stepped off the elevator on their way back from breakfast, a piercing shriek sounded through the hotel corridor. The screaming continued as they ran to investigate.

“It’s coming from our room!” Tom exclaimed.

The boys rushed inside. A terrified chambermaid-her face white as a bed sheet-was standing by the crate. She took one look at Tom and promptly collapsed in a heap.

“Good grief! She has fainted!” Tom said helplessly.

“No wonder-she just saw a ghost,” Bud replied with a chuckle.

People were crowding around the doorway. Tom, greatly embarrassed, explained about the wax figure. A woman soon revived the chambermaid.

“Cool Gave me the worst fright o’ me life, it did,” the maid gasped. “I thought that wax dummy was your corpse, Mr. Swift, an’ you was your own ghost!”

The boys taxied to the wax museum with Sandy and Phyl. Here Tom and Bud had molds of their features made in the museum workshop.

When it was over, Sandy giggled at their red faces. “You look like boiled lobsters!”

“I feel like one!” Bud retorted.

“All in the interests of posterity, gentlemen,” the proprietor said.

Remembering the time difference between England and the United States, Tom wondered if he might get an early-morning call from Enterprises. He decided to check before starting off on a sightseeing trip with Bud and the girls. After asking permission to use the workshop telephone, Tom called the hotel and inquired if there were any messages for him.

“Yes, sir,” the clerk replied. “You just missed a transatlantic call from Admiral Hopkins of the United States Navy in Washington. He said he’d phone back at one p.m. our time.”

Tom hung up thoughtfully and explained to the others. “Bud, suppose you take the girls to that restaurant Sandy and Phyl were talking about Simpson’s in the Strand. After I talk to the admiral, I’ll grab a bite at the hotel, and you can all meet me there later.”

“A girl on each arm!” Bud grinned. “It will be a pleasure, pal!”

Tom taxied back to the hotel. Later, the switchboard operator rang to inform him that Admiral Hopkins was on the line.

“Tom, you’ve heard about the sinking of the S.S. Centurion, of course,” the admiral began.

“I certainly have, sir. It was shocking.”

“The gold bullion carried by that ship amounted to fifteen million dollars,” Hopkins went on. “And that world-famous Delian Apollo was considered a national art treasure. The country which owns it is very much upset over the statue’s loss. So the Navy was asked to undertake a deep-sea salvage job on the Centurion, rather than leave it up to the shipping line.”

“What’s the picture so far, sir?” Tom asked.

“Our subs have been sounding for the wreck the past five days, but haven’t located it.”

“Perhaps Swift Enterprises could help, with our seacoverters and Fat Man suits,” Tom offered. The latter were one-man, mobile diving units, shaped like steel eggs with robot limbs, capable of operating under the greatest ocean pressure.

“I was hoping you’d say that, Tom,” Admiral Hopkins said gratefully. “The Navy Department is convinced that your advanced undersea craft is the only equipment for the job.”

“The Sea Hound is due at London Airport this afternoon,” Tom told him. “I can take off as soon as she arrives.”

After noting down the position at which the Centurion sank, Tom hung up. He decided to turn on his two-way pencil radio in order to get a message from the Sea Hound as soon as it arrived. Then he called a London trucking firm and arranged to have the crated wax figure taken to the airport for shipment home.

On his way to lunch, Tom stopped in the lobby to inform the desk clerk about the van coming to pick up the crate. While Tom was talking, he noticed a wiry muscular-looking man with a deeply tanned face seated in a chair nearby, reading a newspaper. Tom sensed that the stranger was listening to his conversation with the clerk.

“His face sure looks familiar,” Tom thought, as he made his way to the dining room. “Wonder who he is?”

Tom ate a quick lunch of grilled lamb chops, followed by an apple tart. Then he started back through the lobby to take the elevator up to his room. The man with the newspaper was still there. He shot a quick glance at Tom.

“Who is that fellow?” Tom puzzled. “I’m positive I’ve seen him before.”

Going up in the lift, Tom continued to rack his brain about the man’s identity. In his room he stretched out for a short nap. Perhaps, Tom thought, the man had been dressed differently the last time he saw him. Or maybe he had had a beard or a mustache.

“A mustache!” Tom sat bolt upright. “I saw that fellow at the press conference on Fearing and he did have a mustache then! So did the man Chow spotted coming out of my lab!”

Tom swung himself off the bed. “I’ll bet he’s the phony reporter who posed as Venuto Giraud! I’m



going down and have a little chat with that guy!”

Just then the telephone rang. Tom answered.

“Two van men are here to pick up your crate,” the operator said.

“Oh, yes. Send them up, please.”

Tom waited impatiently. In a few moments there was a knock at the door. Two truckers in coverall uniforms were standing outside.

“We’ve come for that crate, guv’nor.”

Tom let them in. “It’s right over there.”

As he turned to point out the packing case, Tom staggered from a sudden hard blow on the back of his head. With a moan, he toppled to the floor, unconscious.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LONDON DRAGNET

IT was past two-thirty when Bud and the two girls arrived back at the hotel. Sandy and Phyl wanted to go to their rooms and freshen up.

“Be ready in ten minutes,” Sandy promised.

“Okay, I’ll clock you.” Bud grinned and glanced at his wristwatch. “I’ll go get genius boy, and we’ll wait for you in the lobby.”

Bud rode on up in the lift to his own floor. As Bud opened the door of their room, he saw Tom, his back turned, standing at the window.

“Here we are, pal,” Bud announced. “Did you get your call from Admiral Hopkins?”

Tom continued to gaze out the window.

“Come, come, professor! Snap out of your scientific fog!” Chuckling, Bud strode toward his friend and clapped him on the back.

To Bud’s amazement, the figure toppled stiffly toward the window! It would have fallen if he had not reached out frantically to grab it.

“Jumpin\* jets! It’s a dummy!” Bud realized. The hairs on the nape of his neck prickled at the weird discovery. Then he took a closer look. “For Pete’s sake, it’s that wax statue of Tom. I must be getting as

silly as that chambermaid I”

Bud glanced around the room and called, “Okay, you comedian, I fell for your little joke! You can come out now and have your laugh I”

There was no answer.

Bud went to the closet and jerked open the door. Empty. So was the bathroom. Feeling more foolish than ever, Bud peered under the beds. Apparently Tom was nowhere in the suite.

“Unless he’s stashed himself in the crate as part of the gag,” Bud thought suddenly. “That’s probably it-the wise guy!”

But as he stood up, Bud noticed that the crate was no longer in the room! He felt a pang of alarm.

“What goes on here?” Bud muttered. He called the desk. “Do you know if Mr. Swift went out?”

“I don’t recall seeing him leave. One moment, please.” The clerk checked the rack. “No, sir, his key wasn’t turned in, so I assume he is still in the hotel. In fact, I spoke to Mr. Swift just awhile ago when the van men arrived.”

“What van men?”

“The ones who came to take the crate to the airport.”

Bud’s heart sank. “Did they take it away?”

“They must have by now, sir. Of course they used the service lift, so I didn’t see them go.”

“Could you try to find out for sure, please?”

“Certainly, sir.” The clerk sounded puzzled as he added, “Is anything wrong?”

“I don’t know. I’ll be down to talk with you.”

After hanging up, Bud paced back and forth trying to decide what to do. Finally he telephoned Sandy. The girls met him in the lobby.

“Bud, what could have happened to Tom?” Sandy asked anxiously.

“No telling-he may have gone out somewhere, I suppose. But it sure seems funny that the wax figure wasn’t taken in the crate.”

The desk clerk, who had been talking on the telephone, beckoned to them. “The porter saw two van men carrying out a large wooden crate about fifteen or twenty minutes ago, sir.”

“Oh, Bud!” Sandy’s voice trembled. “Could they have kidnapped Tom inside the crate?”

“I sure hope not, but we’d better do some fast checking!”

Phyl, pale with fright, put her arm around Sandy. Bud called London Airport and found out Tom’s

seacopter had not yet arrived. So it seemed unlikely that the young inventor would have gone there without notifying anyone.

After hanging up, Bud asked the desk clerk, "Were those men from a real trucking company?"

The clerk frowned. "I do know Mr. Swift was expecting them. Wait a moment! I saw the name on their uniforms-Empire Van Company, Limited."

Bud phoned the firm. A dispatcher confirmed that a truck had been sent to the hotel.

"I can call them by radio, if you like, sir."

"Do that, please," Bud requested.

A few moments later the dispatcher reported back. "No response, sir, but I'll keep trying."

Bud took down a description of the van and its license number. Then he telephoned Scotland Yard and asked to speak to Inspector Raeburn.

The inspector listened to Bud's story. "I'll send a police car to your hotel immediately, and I'll get an alarm out for that van."

The police car soon arrived with a detective sergeant and two constables. They questioned the hotel staff but learned nothing more except a vague description of the two van men. Bud asked if he and the girls could accompany the officers back to Scotland Yard.

"Certainly, sir," Sergeant Vaughan replied.

Raeburn rose to greet them as they were ushered into his office. "I'm afraid that the situation may be serious," he said. "We've found the van. It was parked and abandoned."

Sandy stifled a gasp of fear. "What about the two men-and the crate?" she asked tensely.

"The real van men were found inside, ma'am -bound and gagged. But no crate. I'm afraid the men who came to the hotel were impostors."

A short time later a constable brought two husky-looking men in work clothes into the office. They identified themselves as Fred Bristol and Alf Harvey of the Empire Van Company.

"It's like this, sir," said Bristol. "We pulled up in back of the hotel, and a gent steps out holding a gun. He didn't waste no words-just told us to open the van and climb inside. We could see he meant business, so we did."

"Can you describe him?" Raeburn asked.

"Well dressed. Wiry build. Looked very tanned and fit, he did."

"And he spoke with some kind o' foreign accent," Bristol's mate added.

Raeburn nodded. "Go on."

“Well, then, two other chaps showed up-tough-looking blokes,” Bristol continued. “They got in the van with us, took our uniforms, and tied us up. Then the gent with the gun says to ‘em, ‘You know what do-get on with it!’ “

“What happened after that?” Raeburn asked.

“First they made us lie down and covered us up with canvas. Then the man with the gun stood guard while the other two went off-into the hotel, I expect. After a while they came back again and loaded something into the van.”

“The crate with Tom inside!” Bud muttered.

“Where did they take it?” Raeburn asked.

Bristol shrugged. “No way we could see, sir. But we did hear boat whistles not too far off when they was unloading, so it might’ve been some waterfront warehouse near the Thames. Sounded like dock noises all around.”

Afterward, the trucker related, the van had been driven away and parked. He and his mate were unable to loosen their bonds and had remained tied up inside until a police car found the van on Hampstead Heath.

Bud and the girls were sick with worry after hearing the story.

“Tom must have been knocked out or drugged before he was put into the crate,” Phyl theorized, trying to hold back her tears.

“The kidnappers may be planning to ship him out of the country!” Sandy choked back a sob. “Oh, if we only had some definite duel”

“Don’t worry, miss.” Inspector Raeburn gave her a fatherly pat. “Police and port authorities in Britain will help search for your brother. It won’t be easy to smuggle him out of here.”

The inspector began issuing orders. The telephone rang. One of Raeburn’s men answered.

“For you, Mr. Barclay.”

The caller was burly, genial Arvid Hanson, a gifted craftsman who helped Tom build the pilot models of many of his inventions. Arv announced he had flown the Sea Hound from Fearing to England and was ready for duty. He reported that after calling Tom’s hotel, he had been told to contact Bud at Scotland Yard.

“Tom’s missing, Arv.” Bud explained the situation hastily. “You and the crew stand by for now. We’ll keep you posted.” He hung up.

Sandy’s eyes took on a sudden gleam. “Bud! Wouldn’t Tom have had his pencil radio switched on to hear from the Sea Hound?” she asked.

Bud nodded. “Sure. Arv said that before he phoned the hotel, they kept trying to raise Tom but got no response.”

Sandy turned to Raeburn. "Inspector, I have an idea! Suppose your police transmitter were to broadcast a loud, continuous tone over the special radio frequency used by Swift Enterprises. If Tom's radio is turned on, wouldn't the signal be audible quite a distance from the crate?"

"Sandy, you're terrific!" Bud exclaimed excitedly. "The crate probably is on some dock. The noise of the signal might tip off its location!"

"By jove, you may have something there, Miss Swift!" Inspector Raeburn agreed. "While the signal's being transmitted, I'll have all available manpower combing every warehouse along the Thames River!"

The inspector wrote down Enterprises' special radio frequency, then snatched up the telephone. Bud and the girls settled down tensely to await the outcome of Sandy's plan.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE UNDERSEA MESA

JAKE Swithins, foreman of the Thames Warehouse, was dozing at his desk at the end of a hard day. One of the warehouse crew shook him.

"Well, what's the matter?" Jake grunted.

"Can't you 'ear it?"

"'ear what?"

"That noise."

The foreman listened. Above the dockside clamor outside the warehouse, he heard a shrill hum. "Where's it coming from, Bill?"

"That crate we got for Channel shipment. Better come and 'ave a look."

Jake hoisted his bulk off the chair and accompanied the other man through the gloomy aisles of the warehouse. The hum grew louder as they approached a knot of workmen clustered around a large wooden crate.

"Now then, what's all this?" Jake growled.

"You tell us," one of the men retorted. "Blimey, there might be a bomb in there!"

Jake scowled and tugged his walrus mustache. "This ain't ticking. It's "umming."

"ow do you know what an atomic bomb might do?"

“Atomic bomb?” The foreman’s jaw dropped. “Lumme, I never thought o’ that!”

Jake strode back to his desk and checked the shipping instructions. The crate was to be sent to a Jean Forgeron in Calais, France, aboard a small freight vessel due to dock in the Pool of London that evening. Its contents were declared to be Oriental rugs, and the sender was the Mustafa Carpet Company, London address.

Jake consulted a directory, his sausage-sized fingers fumbling with the pages. No such company was listed! Jake began to perspire.

A second later a police car screeched up to the loading dock outside. Two officers jumped out.

“Where’s that sound coming from?” one asked.

“You got ‘ere just in time!” Jake gasped. “There’s a crate with an atomic bomb inside it!”

“Lead us to it!” the policeman ordered, then added dryly, “Wait’ll you see what’s really in that crate, chum!”

Minutes later, the phone rang in Inspector Raeburn’s office. He snatched it up and spoke with the caller. Sandy, Bud, and Phyl waited breathlessly for his report.

“Your plan worked, Miss Swift-our men found your brother!”

“Oh, thank heavens!” Sandy almost burst into tears of relief. “Is he all right?”

“I hope so, ma’am,” Raeburn said. “He was in the crate, unconscious-apparently drugged. An ambulance is on the way. I’ll have one of our drivers take you to the hospital.”

Half an hour later, the girls and Bud were talking to a pleasant young doctor who had just finished examining Tom.

“He definitely was drugged,” the doctor told them, “but his respiration is normal, and he seems in good shape, so we’ll let him sleep it off. By tomorrow he should be right as rain.”

Inspector Raeburn arrived before they left.

“Good thing you thought of that radio signal, Miss Swift. The crate would have been loaded aboard ship this evening. By midnight she’d have been out of the Thames, bound for Calais.”

“Any clues to the shipper?” Bud asked.

“Not yet. The name given was false.” The inspector shot Bud a shrewd glance. “Do you know of anyone with a grudge against Tom Swift?”

“How about that guy Carlow who accused us of faking our ocean crossing?” Bud suggested. “Oh yes, we found out his name,” Bud said in answer to the inspector’s look of surprise. “Do you think he’s mixed up in this?”

Raeburn nodded. “First man we thought of. However, his hotel says he checked out this morning to return to the States.”

Next morning Tom was completely recovered. When Bud and the girls got to the hospital, they found him up and dressed, talking to Inspector Raeburn.

“Tell us what happened, Tom,” Bud begged.

Tom recounted how the two fake van men had come to his room and knocked him out. He also told about the man in the lobby. “He probably heard everything I told the desk clerk about the truck coming to pick up the wax figure,” Tom went on. “Then he phoned his accomplices and arranged everything while I was eating lunch.”

Inspector Raeburn confirmed the time angle. “The shipping agent says he got an urgent call about the crate around one o’clock. The caller promised to deliver it in time to be loaded when the ship docked.”

He added that Tom’s description of the eavesdropper fitted the gunman who held up the van.

“What name did he give when he called the shipping agent?” Bud asked curiously.

“The Mustafa Carpet Company of London—a firm which doesn’t exist. Supposedly the crate contained Oriental rugs, but how they hoped to get it past French Customs I don’t quite see.”

Tom frowned thoughtfully. “I’m sure my unknown enemies planned to hijack the crate en route—or at least before it was opened in Calais.”

“Could be,” Inspector Raeburn agreed. “The consignee in Calais was given as Jean Forgeron, no address. He was supposed to claim the crate on arrival.”

“Jean Forgeron?” Sandy exclaimed. “In French that means John Smith!”

The inspector looked startled, then smiled dryly. “In other words he doesn’t exist, either. You’d make a good detective, Miss Swift. By the way, Tristan Carlow definitely boarded a plane for the States yesterday morning.”

“I phoned a full report to our plant security chief last night,” Bud added. “He’s going to check on Carlow’s background.”

Finally Inspector Raeburn stood up to leave. “You’ve had two unpleasant experiences since you arrived in England, sir,” he apologetically told Tom. “I trust you won’t hold it against us.”

The young inventor grinned. “Believe me, I’m grateful the British police are so efficient—you probably saved my life.”

The inspector turned to Sandy. “And if you ever decide on a career as a policewoman, Miss Swift, I hope you’ll apply to Scotland Yard first.”

Sandy dimpled. “Thank you. I might do that.”

Bud had had the wax figure crated again, and both this and the boys’ luggage already had been sent to the airport. Tom, Bud, and the girls taxied there directly from the hospital.

“Sandy and I wish you weren’t leaving,” Phyl told the boys wistfully as they were about to board the

Sea Hound.

“You’re going on to Paris?” Tom asked.

“Yes, Dad’s friend, Professor Legron, and his wife have invited us to visit them,” Sandy said.

“Oh, he’s that physics prof at the Sorbonne. This Centurion job may keep us pretty busy, but maybe Bud and I can hop to Paris and join you for a day or two.”

“I sure hope so!” Bud added, blushing as he caught Sandy’s eye.

The Sea Hound was the biggest and sleekest of Tom’s diving seacopters. Its powerful enclosed rotor, spun by atomic turbines, could lift the ship like a helicopter, or submerge it to any depth when the blade pitch was reversed. In sea or air, the craft was jet-propelled.

A rotund, balding figure greeted Tom joyfully as the boys climbed aboard through the entrance hatch. “Boss, you’re a sight fer sore eyes!”

“Chow, you old spud peeler!”

The Texan looked like a worried mother bear as he added, “You gave us an awful scare, gettin’ kidnapped like that, Tom!”

“What scares us is that hot number he’s wearing.” Arv Hanson winked and pointed to Chow’s gaudy red cowboy shirt. “We’re afraid he’s going to set fire to the galley.”

“Maybe we’d better play safe and douse him now.” Bud reached for a fire extinguisher.

“Don’t get fresh, you hombres, jest ‘cause I look so high-styled!” Chow roared indignantly.

Chuckling, Tom took his place at the controls. He and Bud waved a final farewell to the girls through the cabin window. Then, after clearing with the tower, Tom gunned the atomic turbines and the Sea Hound zoomed up into the blue.

Soon Land’s End was lost to view and they were jetting over the Atlantic. Bud joked with the crew, but Tom was silent and absorbed as he turned the mystery over and over in his mind.

Why had he been kidnapped in London? Who was the mysterious enemy who had sabotaged his and Bud’s electronic hydrolungs? And where did Tristan Carlow fit into the picture with his threats and his underhanded attempt to discredit the two hydronauts?

“Almost there, aren’t we?” Arv Hanson asked. He was studying a hydrographic chart on which Tom had marked the position of the sinking.

“Just about.” Tom watched the latitude and longitude figures clicking off on the dials of his automatic navigator. Presently he cut the jets and brought the Sea Hound gently down on the water. “Prepare to dive!” As Tom reversed the rotor and eased the control wheel forward, the seacopter plummeted downward into the ocean.

The bright blue-green of the surface waters faded into gray. At a hundred fathoms they were beyond the sunlight zone and descending into the realm of perpetual night. Flickering trails of luminescence marked



the passage of strange deep-sea fishes. Tom switched on the search beam.

At last the Sea Hound settled with a bump onto the ocean floor. Tom threw a lever, extending a set of caterpillar treads below the hull, and steered the craft in a search pattern.

“Getting anything on the scope?” Tom asked.

“No blips so far,” the sonarman replied.

Tom combed the area carefully for about two hours. Then he retracted the crawl treads and slowed the rotor enough for the ship to rise off the sea floor. Using its jets, the Sea Hound now began roving back and forth in a much wider pattern. But there was no sign of the sunken liner. Tom and his crew were mystified.

“Could the Centurion’s navigator have given a wrong position?” Bud asked.

Tom shrugged. “He might have made a slight navigational error. But the passengers and crew were picked up close to the radioed position.”

For almost twenty-four hours the Sea Hound continued its search with no results, using both sonar and Tom Sr.’s underwater metal detector. Baffled, Tom finally gave up the hunt.

“Too bad the Sea Hound isn’t a bloodhound,” Bud remarked glumly as the craft headed westward. “Maybe we could sniff out the wreck.”

Tom shot a thoughtful glance at his chum. “You might have something there, pal.”

Before returning to Fearing, Tom was eager to investigate the seamount where he and Bud had glimpsed the lights. When they reached the spot, sonar revealed no vessel in the vicinity, but Tom surfaced and checked by radar to make sure.

Apparently the electric trawler was not in the area.

Submerging again, Tom steered closer and swept the underwater formation with the yellow glare of their beam. “It’s a guyot, Bud!”

“A ghee-oh? What’s that?”

“A flat-topped, extinct underwater volcano,” Tom explained. “Oceanographers have spotted a number of them in both the Atlantic and Pacific. They were named after a Princeton professor.”

“What gave ‘em that flat Ivy League crew cut?”

Tom grinned. “One guess is, they stood above sea level centuries ago and were worn down by the surf.”

Tom landed the Sea Hound atop the undersea mesa. Then he and Bud donned hydrolung gear and went out through the ship’s air lock. The boys separated to look around.

The edges of the guyot were fringed with a natural deposit of large stones. Bud realized he and Tom had been too far away and at too low a depth for a clear view of the mesa top when they sighted it before. Suddenly his earphones crackled with an excited call from Tom:

“We weren’t imagining things, Bud-something was going on here! I’ve just found a clue!”

## CHAPTER X

### BLOODHOUND EXPERIMENT

BUD glided quickly to his friend’s side. Tom was holding up a portable underwater lantern!

“One of the lights we saw!” Bud exclaimed. “There must have been divers operating here!”

“Right,” Tom agreed. “And whatever they were doing must’ve been important or that electric trawler wouldn’t have been guarding the spot.”

Back on the Sea Hound, Tom examined his find.

“A mercury short-arc lamp with a cadmium battery. Boy, this is really powerful, Bud I’

“Ever seen one like it before?” Bud asked.

“Not this particular model. Hmm-made in Italy. With luck we may be able to trace this lamp. But now we must start for home.”

It was late in the afternoon when the Sea Hound landed on Fearing Island. Base technicians and rocket crewmen swarmed around the seacopter to congratulate the two hydronauts.

“Give us air, fellows!” Bud pleaded jokingly. “Our oxygen supply’s giving out!”

The boys finally managed to break away. After transferring to a Whirling Duck-a jet heliplane invented by Tom-they flew on to Swift Enterprises with Chow. News of their arrival had been radioed ahead. The sprawling experimental station was dotted with cheering employees. Mr. Swift and Harlan Ames rescued the hydronauts from the throng, and they jeeped to the plant security office for a relaxed debriefing session.

“Thank goodness we didn’t have to fight off any newsmen this time,” Tom said with a grin.

“Harlan’s been stalling them for the past twenty-four hours,” Mr. Swift replied. “They’re after two stories now-your Atlantic crossing and the Centurion project.”

When they were seated in the security office, Ames went on to explain that an official news story had been given out in Washington that Tom Swift would take charge of the salvage operations. “Reporters have been badgering us ever since, but so far we’ve given them nothing except a brief news release your father wrote.”

Tom read the release and nodded approval. “I agree it’ll be safer to say as little as possible till we know

what my enemy's up to. As a matter of fact, I didn't know I was in charge."

The young inventor discussed his kidnapping with Tom Sr. and Ames, and also showed them the underwater lamp. Ames promised to check out the clue through the manufacturer.

"I've checked on Tristan Carlow," Ames added.

"He's worked for half a dozen companies and hasn't lasted a year with any of them. Brilliant mind, they say, but the guy's a crackpot."

"Sounds like our boy, all right," Bud said.

Ames grinned. "Carlow's now set up as a consulting engineer-tiny office in New York, no staff. No police record, but he's been in a few legal hassles with dissatisfied clients. And here's the payoff, skipper-there were a few newspaper rumors that he would head up the Centurion salvage job. When I traced them down, it turned out Carlow planted those rumors himself."

Tom whistled. "That's interesting, Harlan. I'll find out what the Navy knows about him."

"By the way, son," said Mr. Swift, "what do you plan to do about finding the Centurion?"

"Right now I'm stumped, Dad. But Bud gave me an idea. I think I can invent a device that will track objects underwater."

"You mean you're serious about that underwater bloodhound stuff?" Bud exclaimed.

"Sure. I think it can be worked out."

"Something that can actually sniff out an underwater trail?" Ames asked half-jokingly.

"Let's say it would be able to detect such a trail. You see," Tom explained, "practically any object which passes through water will leave faint chemical traces which will register on a highly sensitive detector. For instance, a salmon can smell and taste the silt of its home spawning grounds. That's how it finds its way upriver to the stream where it hatched. It can detect its home silt even in strengths of only one part silt to a million parts of ocean water."

"Wow! Pretty keen sniffing," Bud murmured.

"With modern scientific methods, we can make a salmon's nose look pretty crude."

Mr. Swift frowned thoughtfully. "That's a remarkable idea, son. It certainly will present some interesting technical problems."

Tom called Washington immediately and made a full report to Admiral Hopkins. The admiral was as baffled as Tom over the whereabouts of the S.S. Centurion.

"I'm confident the navigator's position was accurate," Hopkins said. "We know the latitude and longitude at which the lifeboats were picked up, and after allowing for drift, the figures check out closely with the position he gave us."

When Tom mentioned his detector idea, the Navy man urged him to get to work on it promptly.

“Sorry we had to release that news story so early, Tom,” Admiral Hopkins went on. “The loss of the Delian Apollo has caused a big fuss in the country which sent it. We thought it might soothe people’s feelings if they knew Tom Swift had been called in on the salvage job.”

“The story said I was to take charge.”

“Right. Our top brass feels you should oversee the whole operation. Procurement’s drawing up a contract now.”

Tom felt somewhat overwhelmed at the grave responsibility but patriotically agreed to take on the job. “By the way, sir,” he added, “do you know a man named Tristan Carlow?”

Hopkins snorted. “Indeed I do. He was pressuring the Navy Department to let him take over the salvage assignment. But our research lab checked his plans and turned thumbs down. He talked big but couldn’t produce.”

“Did he know in advance that you were going to call me in on the job?” Tom asked.

“Yes, I told him so to get rid of him, the day before I phoned you in London.” Admiral Hopkins was outraged when Tom told him about Carlow’s actions in England. “It’s obvious what he was up to,” Hopkins fumed. “First, he was trying to change the Navy’s mind by having you branded a scientific faker. When that failed, he tried to worm himself into the project as your partner.”

Tom was inclined to agree. The admiral’s thinking backed up his own hunch about Carlow.

Next morning Tom plunged to work in his ultramodern private laboratory. For his basic detector, he began designing a mass spectroscope that would use a repelatron field to separate the elements and isotopes present in the sea water. Tom had invented the repelatron, or repulsion-ray system, to drive his moonship, the Challenger.

The following day Chow found him checking a tangle of transistor circuitry in a console studded with tiny lights. It was connected to a horn-shaped device in a tank of water.

“Fish market’s gettin’ them critters, boss!”

Tom looked up blankly. “What critters?”

“Them catfish an’ dogfish you want. Mr. Rohrig says he’ll have a batch for you tomorrow.”

“What makes you think I want any catfish and dogfish?” Tom asked, mystified.

“Bud told me. He said you’re plannin’ to breed an undersea bloodhound, and you’d need some cat and dogfish for your underwater trail-sniffin’ experiments.”

Tom roared with laughter. “I’m sorry, old-timer, but fly-boy’s been spoofing you again.” Seeing Chow’s indignant look, Tom went on, “My undersea tracker will work electronically. Here, I’ll give you a demonstration.”

Tom flung some iron filings into the tank of water, then switched on the console. Instantly three out of eight lights flashed on, labeled “Fe” for iron. Several other lights also came on.

“You see, this shows us that three different isotopes of iron are present in the water,” Tom explained, pointing to the lights, “as well as a certain amount of chlorine and some minerals.”

“Brand my boiler scale, that’s plumb wonderful, Tom!” Chow exclaimed. “Could you cut sign on an enemy sub with them lights?”

“Well, let’s say they’d help clue us in. If we found the right indications, like certain metallic or oil traces, we could guess a submarine had passed that way. But to follow a trail, it will take lots more gadgetry than this.”

For the next forty-eight hours Tom worked at a furious pace. Then he flew to Fearing and began installing his tracker on the Sea Hound with the help of Bud, Hank Sterling, and Arv Hanson.

“Sure wish I could help you run that pilot test,” Bud said regretfully, “but I’d hate to miss seeing Mom and Dad in New York.”

Bud’s parents had called from San Francisco saying they would arrive at International Airport at noon and be in New York City for a few hours before embarking on a West Indies cruise.

“You go right ahead and meet your parents-and please give them my regards,” Tom replied. “Hank says he’ll be ‘it’ for our underwater hide-and-seek game.”

The seacopter had been brought to an airfield hangar for the installation job. Nine long, bell-flared horns projected around the nose of the craft. These, Tom explained, were his repellospectrograph detectors, or RSG units, with built-in driltometers.

“They’ll sample the sea water from nine different directions around the ship,” Tom said. “A computer inside, called a coincidence analyzer or CO-AN, will spot any particles of matter which show up evenly among the samples. It will also figure the direction in which to find the greatest concentration of those particles, after allowing for current drift.”

Inside the Sea Hound’s cabin, the other units of Tom’s tracking apparatus had been combined into a large control and output console.

“The foreign particles spotted by the CO-AN will show up as flashing lights on this readout panel,” Tom went on. “I’ll pick out whichever ones we want to follow, and then tune in those same elements on this TC, or trail constructor.”

“Like saying ‘Follow that taxi!’ to your undersea driver, eh?” Bud quipped.

“Right. Now those orders are fed to a compound trace synthesizer or CTS. It compares them with the signals it’s receiving from CO-AN-and figures out what course must be steered to keep the two sets of data matched up.”

“And the CTS outputs to these scopes?” Hank asked.

“Yes, they’re our visual guides if we want to steer manually,” Tom replied. “On this first scope, a luminous dotted line will show the compass course of the object we’re tracking. This second scope is a depth chart, to show its upward or downward course. And a dot will center on this cross-hair scope if we steer on the beam.”

“How about these two marker arrows on the driftometer output dial?” Arv put in.

“We align them to compensate for any current.”

A small toggle switch could be flipped to change from manual steering to automatic pilot. Tom also pointed out tape reels for recording all data.

The test got underway after lunch. Hank had taken off from the island two hours earlier in a hydrolung suit. The Sea Hound submerged and started cruising to pick up his trail. Tom grinned as he watched the lights on the element panel.

“It’s a cinch: The thallium traces from his Tomasite plastic suit are a dead giveaway. So’s the selenium from his solar-charged battery.”

As Tom tuned the TC and switched to autopilot, the Hound circled to ferret out the center of diffusion. Then its course straightened as the tracker “locked on” to the hydronaut’s trail.

After heading out to sea, Hank’s trail zigzagged and gradually curved back toward Fearing Island. Suddenly Tom frowned.

“What’s wrong, skipper?” Arv Hanson asked.

Tom pointed to two lights on the readout panel. “Traces of nickel and cadmium. Could be from battery-operated gear-but not Hank’s.”

The strange indications mingled with Hank’s trail. Was it an enemy? The course veered from Fearing and led toward the mainland. Tom grew worried as the traces persisted. As they neared the beach, he surfaced and took to the air.

Ahead, on the shore, lay a man’s body, sprawled near the mouth of a rocky inlet I

“It’s Hank!” Arv cried out.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SHARK MAN

THE figure was unmistakable-clad in hydrolung gear with the hood unzipped. Tom landed the Sea Hound quickly on the beach while Arv radioed Enterprises for help. In a moment they were at Hank’s side. Tom bent over him anxiously and checked his pulse and breathing.

“Thank goodness, he’s still alive!”

“What happened to him?” Arv asked.

Tom shook his head, puzzled. "I don't know -just knocked out, I hope."

A Whirling Duck soon arrived, bringing Doc Simpson, the young medic from the plant infirmary. He was accompanied by Harlan Ames and Phil Radnor, Ames's stocky, barrel-chested assistant. While Doc examined the unconscious man, Tom told the two security officers how he had detected the trail of some stranger or strange craft before finding Hank on the beach.

"He's not in shock and I don't see any head contusions," Doc announced. "I'd say he might have been gassed-but that's only a guess."

Hank was now stirring slightly. After Doc Simpson passed some spirits of ammonia under his nose, the husky trouble shooter soon revived.

"Feel like talking?" Tom asked.

"Sure, I'm okay now." Hank managed to give a somewhat woozy grin and insisted upon getting to his feet. "After I headed out to sea, I tried to fool your tracking gear by doubling back to Fearing. But when I got near the island, I sighted a big shark-at least that's what I thought it was."

"What do you mean?" Tom asked.

"Well, I had my hydrophone pickup switched on, and I suddenly realized this thing was giving off fish noises-you know, beeping and grunting."

Ames looked puzzled. "Is that unusual?"

"Sure is," Hank replied. "Sharks don't make such noises-they're the strong, silent type."

"They have no swim bladders," Tom explained, "which is the organ most fish use for producing sounds. Sharks don't even have the right kind of teeth to make grinding noises."

"Another thing," Hank went on, "its body looked phony-too rigid. It wasn't bending or curving the way any fish does as it swims."

"Then what was it?" Ames put in, frowning.

"A disguised, miniature one-man sub," Hank said grimly. His listeners were startled.

"Are you sure?" Tom pressed him.

"Positive. When I tried to move in for a closer look, the thing streaked off toward the mainland. Then I saw its tail was really a hinged rudder-and I could tell from its wake that it was being driven by a propeller screw."

Hank related that he had pursued the fake shark to the mainland, reaching shore a few moments after it grounded in a shallow inlet.

"Just as I got my hood off," Hank continued, "I saw a hatch open in the 'shark' and a man climbed out. He was wearing skin-diving gear, with his goggles pushed up. When I went toward him, he pulled a queer-looking gun and pointed it at me. After that, I blacked out."

“Must have been a gas gun-or some kind of ray gun,” Tom speculated.

Ames, Radnor, and the others now hurried over to survey the shallow creek where the miniature submarine had grounded. Marks in the muddy bank showed where it had been hauled up out of the water. There were also two confused sets of footprints-one obviously made by a person wearing flippers, the other regular shoes.

“Someone must have been standing by to help the shark man after he landed,” Ames commented. “Let’s take a look over by the road.”

Several hundred yards away was a paved highway, partly hidden from the creek and the shoreline by trees and shrubbery. When the Enterprises men checked, they found truck-tire marks and more of the same prints on the soft shoulder bordering the pavement. Evidently the shark man and his helper had loaded the miniature sub on the truck and driven off.

Radnor set about making plaster impressions of the footprints and tire markings. Ames remarked worriedly, “I’d sure like to know what that phony shark was doing around Fearing Island.”

“Scouting the base-what else?” Tom replied. “The fish noises were a clever cover-up. Even if the thing was detected on sonar, our hydrophones would have interpreted it as a fish.”

“But what was the guy after?” Ames persisted.

“Maybe he was on some kind of sabotage mission.”

“Maybe his target was you, skipper.” Ames scowled and paced up and down. “Incidentally, Tom, I just had a call from Scotland Yard.”

“About what?”

“Your kidnapping. The French police have had the docks and the Customs warehouse staked out ever since that ship landed at Calais. So far, no one has showed up to claim the crate.”

Hank was flown back to Enterprises in the Whirling Duck for a checkup. En route, Ames radioed a full report to the State Police.

Meanwhile, the Sea Hound returned to Fearing. Tom planned to take off from the rocket base early the next morning to resume his search for the Centurion.

Bud was enthusiastic when he heard how well Tom’s undersea tracker had performed during the test. “Got a name yet for this undersea bloodhound?”

Tom considered for a moment. “Well, it detects its quarry’s spoor underwater by actually sorting out atoms-so how about combining the Latin word for water, aqua, with atomic and calling it an aquatomic tracker?”

“Perfect, pal!” Bud said. “I’ll bet it sniffs out the Centurion in nothing flat.”

“Let’s keep our fingers crossed,” Tom replied. “Hank’s trail was only a couple of hours old, but that liner was sunk over ten days ago. With all the diffusion that’s taken place since, its trail will be colder than



a bloodhound's nose.”

Next morning the Sea Hound streaked eastward at supersonic speed. When they were over the Centurion's reported position, Tom landed on the water and submerged. He began cruising about beneath the surface.

“What do we look for?” Bud asked.

“There's a whole slew of traces we might look for,” Tom said. “However, I got an exact chemical analysis of the paint used on the Centurion, both hull and topside, and also of the scrubbing compound used on her deck planking. They should be easy for the tracker to detect.”

Suddenly the young inventor tensed as he watched the readout panel. “Thar she blows, Bud—we've picked up her trail!” Hastily Tom turned a number of elements on the trail constructor, then flicked the toggle switch from manual to autopilot.

For several moments the Sea Hound swerved about in seemingly aimless fashion as the tracker processed the information feeding to it from the RSG units on the bow. Gradually the seacopter's course tightened into a downward spiral.

“Wow! This must be right where the Centurion took her plunge!” Arv Hanson murmured breathlessly. “Kind of a weird feeling, eh, skipper?”

Tom was studying the readout lights and the RSG monitor. Bud noticed his puzzled look.

“What gives, genius boy?”

“Our detectors are reporting traces of plutonium 239.”

“Maybe we're picking up our own trail,” Bud suggested. “Don't forget, we combed this whole area before in the Sea Hound.”

Tom shook his head. “Our reactor uses Swiftonium. Must be from another sub—maybe one of the Navy nukes that searched for the Centurion.”

At a depth of little more than a hundred feet, the Sea Hound leveled off on a roughly southwesterly course. At once the seacopter went into a series of wild gyrations! The occupants of the cabin were almost hurled off their feet.

“Roarin' rockets!” Bud screeched, grabbing a stanchion. “Is this thing going crazy?”

Tom hastily switched to manual steering—but the tracker's output scopes appeared to have gone dead! Baffled, the young inventor began a quick trouble-shooting check of the circuitry. An hour later he still had not traced the cause.

“This beats me,” Tom confessed.

“Maybe that radioactivity made the detectors blow a fuse,” one crewman suggested.

“No, it wasn't an electrical breakdown. This looks to me more like a nervous breakdown.”

Bud stared at Tom. "Are you kidding?"

"No, I mean it. Computers do go haywire sometimes and exhibit behavior resembling a nervous breakdown in humans. It may happen when, for some reason, they can't process the information they're being fed-or if they're given an impossible problem to solve. Something like that must have happened to the coincidence analyzer or the compound trace synthesizer."

Tom switched on the aquatomic tracker again. But as before, its output oscillated wildly and after a few moments ceased to register.

With a frustrated feeling, the young inventor gave up and returned to Fearing Island. Here he removed the tracking apparatus from the Sea Hound and flew it back to Enterprises.

Tom worked intently in his laboratory for the rest of the day. He redesigned the logic circuitry and the memory system of both the COAN and the CTS so that each unit could handle a greater input and process it more speedily. Chow brought in a tasty steak with French fried potatoes, but Tom barely noticed what he was eating.

It was late at night when the young inventor finally stopped work. A strange theory had been forming in his mind. Tom wanted time to think it out. Stretching wearily, he got up from his workbench, went into the apartment adjoining his laboratory, and made some hot cocoa.

"If I'm right," Tom mused, "those atomic sub traces are no coincidence-and they weren't from a Navy sub, either. It might even explain why my aquatomic tracker goofed off so badly."

Tom sipped his cocoa slowly, trying to keep his eyes open. Gradually his head sagged, and he dozed off.

Kapow! Tom was awakened by a muffled report, followed by a crashing noise from the laboratory.

Wide awake, Tom sprang up and rushed into the laboratory. The wax figure he had brought back from London lay face down on the floor!

"What happened?" Tom wondered. He dashed across the room and pushed open the door leading to the outside corridor.

A man was running down the hall toward the front door! He was clutching a revolver with a silencer attached to the muzzle I

## CHAPTER XII

### MYSTERY MILLIONAIRE

TOM jabbed an alarm button on the wall and ran after the intruder. By this time the gunman had reached the front door. The banshee wail of the alarm siren seemed to panic him. Floodlights were blazing on all

over the experimental station. The man whirled, caught sight of Tom, and fired wildly!

Tom dove to the floor. The bullet whined over his head to lodge somewhere in the wall plaster.

Without waiting to take another shot, the man fled. Tom jumped to his feet and dashed out of the lab building in pursuit. Security guards were running toward the scene from all directions.

“There he goes!” Tom yelled, pointing.

The man zigzagged and glanced from side to side as he ran, like a fox trapped by hounds. One of the guards was already circling to cut off his escape. As the gunman swerved to avoid capture, his foot stubbed on a stone. He went sprawling headfirst!

Tom was on him in a flash. The intruder’s gun had dropped from his hand as he fell. Tom gave him no chance to grope for the weapon-gripping the man’s neck from behind in the crook of one arm.

The intruder struggled upright and broke the grip by hurling Tom over his shoulders with a judo throw. But the young inventor recovered instantly, tackled the man around the legs, and sent him crashing to the ground again. The two exchanged several blows before the security guards reached the spot. They quickly subdued the man, jerked him to his feet, and handcuffed him.

“Who is he, skipper?” one of the guards asked.

“Search me,” Tom replied. “I don’t even know how he got inside the plant.”

The man was tall, big-nosed, and brawny looking, clad in a dark-colored shirt and slacks. He was panting, and his slick sandy hair was disheveled from the fight. A guard frisked him but found nothing in his pockets except a bracelet containing a small electronic amulet.

“There’s the answer to how he sneaked in without being detected,” the guard said.

Every Enterprises employee was issued one of the amulet bracelets, which were designed to trap radar impulses. Without such a bracelet, the intruder’s presence would have been revealed at once by a blip on the plant radarscope.

“Where’d you get this?” Tom asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know!” snarled the captive.

Tom turned to the guards. “Take him to the security office and call Harlan Ames.”

Tom went back to his laboratory and examined the wax figure. A bullet had struck the back of its head, and the fall had smashed its features. “Too bad, but you sure earned your trip over from London,” Tom thought. “You saved my life.”

Ames reached the plant twenty minutes later. Both he and Tom questioned the prisoner but could learn nothing.

“Maybe a night in jail will change his mind!” Ames snapped. He telephoned the Shopton police, then ordered the man held in another room until the police car came to pick him up.

"I've checked out the serial number on that amulet," an aide reported. "It belongs to one of our millwrights-Dan Feasler."

"Have you tried reaching Feasler?" Ames asked.

"We've phoned him, but no one answers. Radnor is on his way out to Feasler's house."

"I sure hope Dan's all right," Tom said worriedly. "That guy probably took his amulet by force. Then he must have gotten in by scaling the plant wall, knowing the amulet would protect him from our warning system."

Ames nodded. "It's a cinch he came here intending to kill you, skipper. Luckily he mistook that wax figure for the real Tom Swift."

Next morning Tom learned that Dan Feasler had been found by a police car. He had been robbed of his amulet at gunpoint, knocked out, and dragged into an alley. Tom, acting on a hunch, drove Hank Sterling to Shopton Police Headquarters to view the prisoner in his cell.

"He's the shark man, all right," Hank said.

The prisoner stared back in sullen silence.

"That makes three raps you'll be facing," said Chief Slater, who had accompanied Tom and Hank to the cellblock. "Spying on a government restricted area, felonious assault, and attempted murder. Better start talking, mister, or we'll throw the book at you."

"I told you before I've got nothing to say."

Tom and Hank drove back to Enterprises.

"Do you suppose he's keeping his lip zipped to protect someone, skipper?" Hank asked.

Tom shook his head. "More likely he's protecting himself. I feel certain that he's not the brains behind all this, Hank. I think someone paid him, and now he's afraid to squeal for fear of that person's vengeance later on."

At the plant, Ames greeted Tom with exciting news. "I just got a cable from Italy, skipper. The police over there have traced that underwater lamp you found. It was one of a group of extra-powerful lamps manufactured by an Italian firm on special order for Petrov Vaxilis."

"Petrov Vaxilis!" Tom was startled. "He's that mysterious millionaire who lives over on the French Riviera, isn't he?"

"That's right. Reportedly, he has built up a huge fortune in shipping, oil, armaments, and a dozen other businesses, but no one knows much about him. He lives in a huge villa in Monaco and dodges all publicity."

Tom whistled-then frowned. "That's interesting, Harlan. But it doesn't explain what was happening on that undersea mesa. And on such slim evidence, we sure can't accuse a big shot like Vaxilis of causing that electric shock attack."

Ames agreed. "Even if you found the electric fishing vessel, the operators could claim they were just fishing and the whole thing was an accident. All the same, we'll check up on Mr. Vaxilis."

Tom put the matter out of his mind while he returned to the job of redesigning his aquatomic tracker. After lunch he visited Dan Feasler at the Shopton Hospital and was glad to find the millwright fully recovered. Tom drove back to his laboratory at Enterprises and by evening had the tracker ready for a new trial.

At dinner Tom mentioned to his parents how the lamp found on the guyot had been traced to Petrov Vaxilis.

"Vaxilis has always conducted his affairs in great secrecy," Mr. Swift said. "We're not the only ones who'd like to know more about him."

"He certainly sounds like an unusual person," Mrs. Swift put in. "I read a magazine article about him recently-'The Riviera's Man of Mystery.' Would you like me to look it up, Tom?"

"Wish you would, Mom," Tom said. "I'd like all the information on Vaxilis I can get."

Next morning Tom and Bud flew to Fearing Island, taking the improved model of the aquatomic tracker. After installing it in the Sea Hound, they took off and jetted eastward. Once again, Tom landed gently among the waves at the spot where the Centurion had sunk. Then he reversed blade pitch and eased the control wheel forward. The seacopter plunged smoothly into the water.

Soon the liner's trace elements began to flash on the readout panel. Tom adjusted the aquatomic tracker to follow the trail automatically. As the Sea Hound nosed downward, all hands waited eagerly to see how the improved model of Tom's invention would perform.

Again the seacopter leveled off more than a hundred feet below the surface. But this time she locked on to the Centurion's trail and settled on course with no preliminary weaving.

"Nice going, Tom! Looks as though you've ironed all the bugs out of the tracker," Bud said. Puzzled, he added, "But how come we're traveling on a horizontal course?"

"Good question-we should know the answer soon." For several minutes Tom studied the element and isotope lights on the control panel. "Notice we're still registering plutonium."

"Those same submarine traces, eh? What does it mean, Tom?"

"Unless I'm mistaken," the young inventor replied, "it means the Centurion was pirated by a large sub after it sank."

Tom's words brought gasps from Bud and the others. They stared at him in amazement.

"Pirated?" Arv Hanson echoed. "Do you mean that a submarine made off with the liner underwater?"

Tom nodded quietly. "Yes, and that's why we were unable to find her. I believe the Centurion was towed away on this course."

"But how could a sub tow a sinking ship?" Bud asked. "How could it even attach a towline?"

“After the bomb exploded, the Centurion’s skipper tried to control the damage by rigging collision mats over the hole in the hull and closing certain watertight doors belowdecks,” Tom replied. “She wallowed for a while before she went down. That would have given the sub time to send out frogmen to attach a towline-or maybe some kind of magnetic grappling device.”

Tom added that this would also explain the Sea Hound’s gyrations and the tracker’s failure on their first attempt to trail the Centurion.

“The liner would still have some buoyancy due to entrapped air, since the water pressure at this depth probably wouldn’t rupture her inner compartmentation. She wouldn’t be too hard to tow underwater, except that she’d bob and weave around on her towline like a crazy pendulum till they got going. That’s what confused our tracking detectors-and also the fact that the submarine’s propeller wake stirred up the trace pattern even worse.”

The Sea Hound plowed rapidly along on a southwesterly course. Some time later a mountainous undersea formation became visible dead ahead.

“It’s the guyot where we saw those lights 1” Bud called out.

Tom’s eyes blazed with excitement. “No wonder that electric trawler was so eager to keep us away, Bud!” he exclaimed. “Those lights must have been used by frogmen who were looting the Centurion!”

## CHAPTER XIII

### GOLD CLUE

ARV and the other crewmen were as astounded as Bud. But Tom’s theory seemed to be borne out as the Sea Hound glided down toward the mesa, about two hundred and fifty feet below the surface.

“There’d be plenty of reason to loot her with all that gold aboard-and the statue, too,” Arv agreed. “Could you make out anything like a liner’s hulk when you spotted those lights?”

Tom shook his head. “The guyot’s pretty big and we were approaching at too low a depth to see what was happening on top. All we could make out through the murk were gleams of light.”

“But why tow the Centurion all the way here to loot her?” Arv asked.

“Simple. The ocean’s over two miles deep in this area,” Tom replied. “If they had let her sink to the ocean floor, no ordinary sub could have got close to her. But lodging the ship on the guyot kept her at an easy depth for frogmen.”

Bud’s eyes widened. “Boy, what a neat trick!”

“If I’m right, the whole crime was cleverly planned and carried out,” Tom said.

“How do you figure they pulled the job?”

“Well, it’s a cinch the sub didn’t just happen along-she must have been dogging the Centurion, waiting to pounce,” Tom reasoned. “The bomb was probably planted aboard while she was still in port and set to explode at a time when she’d be as near as possible to the guyot.”

After skimming the mesa, the Sea Hound veered to the north. Tom watched the lights and output scopes on the tracker’s control board. Evidently, after being looted, the liner had been towed away from the guyot-but where?

About fifty miles northward, Tom nosed the Sea Hound downward. He turned on her search beam and switched to manual control to ease the descent. Down, down they plunged with the yellow glare of their beam carving a hole of light through the darkening waters.

Minutes later, the seacopter’s crew gasped in awe. Below, on the sea floor, lay the foundered liner. It was toppled on one side and slightly upended-its nose buried in silt-so that the name Centurion was readable across the stern.

A gaping hole in the hull showed where the bomb had exploded. Another hole smaller and neater-was visible farther forward.

“The sub’s frogmen must have cut that other hole to remove the gold,” Bud remarked.

“Probably so,” Tom agreed. “That may be the location of the hold where the bullion was stored. The Apollo statue was stowed there, too, I’d say, since both valuables had to be kept under guard.”

“Wonder why the ship was dumped here?” Arv said, after a moment of grim silence.

Tom rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “My guess is they weren’t taking any chances. That electric trawler spotted us prying around the guyot, so they probably decided to remove the evidence in case we came back later to investigate.”

Tom landed the Sea Hound near the sunken liner. Then he and Bud squirmed into Fat Man suits, geared for deep-sea work. The boys waddled out through the air lock and made their way to the Centurion. Tom paused to inspect the bomb damage, which had occurred at the ship’s engine room. Then he and Bud moved cautiously over the hull toward the other hole. This clearly had been cut with a torch.

Tom switched on his suit light to peer into the hold. It was empty! The bullion and the statue were gone!

“What’s the next move, Tom?” Bud asked when they were back aboard the Sea Hound.

“We’ll try to trail that sub.”

To Tom’s surprise, the plutonium traces led upward to the surface.

“Maybe they came topside to send a radio message,” Arv suggested.

“Good guess,” Tom agreed. “Or if it was nighttime, they may have preferred to cruise on the surface awhile.”

The trail did continue on the surface-again southeastward. After a few miles the seacopter began to

weave uncertainly.

“Tracker flipped its wig again?” Bud asked.

Tom frowned and shook his head. “No, the output scopes are still registering. But the target-course lines have stopped.” On a hunch, Tom radioed the U. S. Weather Bureau and learned that a severe storm had passed over the area two days before. “I’m afraid that’s our answer,” he told the others. “The storm dispersed the traces so much that the tracker no longer has a pattern to follow.”

Disappointed, Tom returned to Fearing. Then he and Bud flew back to Enterprises. Mr. Swift and Harlan Ames were astounded at Tom’s story.

“Millions in gold-and the Delian Apollo is priceless!” Ames exclaimed. “It’s the biggest pirating job that was ever pulled off!”

“And the most fiendishly clever,” Mr. Swift added.

“I’m sure now that the same men were responsible for sabotaging your hydrolungs,” Ames went on. “When your project was first announced, some news reports gave the exact course you’d navigate. These men must have figured you’d be passing too close to their guyot. That probably threw a scare into them.”

“Right-so they tried to stop us. Later, their sentries on the electric trawler detected us and guessed that we’d spotted something going on. Then they tried to get rid of me in London to keep me from ever coming back to investigate.”

Mr. Swift frowned worriedly. “Your theory certainly is sound. And they may try again.”

Tom phoned both the CIA and Admiral Hopkins in Washington and made a full report. Both suggested that the news of the liner’s looting be withheld so as not to alert the criminals.

“But remember, Tom,” the admiral warned, “those fiends know your prowess as a scientist, and they may well guess that you’ve uncovered their vicious plot by this time. From now on, please don’t take any unnecessary risks!”

At home that evening Mrs. Swift showed Tom a copy of World-week magazine. “It’s the issue with the article about Petrov Vaxilis,” she said.

“Thanks, Mom. I’ll look it over right now.”

Most of the article about Vaxilis concerned his business interests. It stated that he operated through a tangle of holding companies, which made it almost impossible to trace the many firms which the mysterious tycoon controlled.

Tom was far more interested when he read that Vaxilis was an avid art collector. For some unknown reason, the article said, he never allowed outsiders to view his fabulous collection of paintings and art objects.

“Dad, this ties in!” Tom said, after showing the story to his father. “Vaxilis is already one of the richest men alive, so the gold bullion alone wouldn’t mean much to him. But maybe a world-famous art treasure like the Delian Apollo was something he couldn’t resist. Maybe that tempted him to pirate the



Centurion!”

“Hmm. Let’s not jump to conclusions, son. But your theory might well explain why he never lets the public see his art collection.”

“Sure. If he’s stolen other masterpieces, he wouldn’t dare let an outsider glimpse them.”

Mr. Swift paced up and down. “You could be right. There have been a rash of art thefts in Europe. A number of famous paintings and other objects have been stolen. Vaxilis might be the mastermind behind those crimes and ruthless enough to pursue his art mania at any cost.”

“Dad, I’m going to Europe and see Vaxilis!”

Tom Sr. approved his son’s plan. Next morning when Tom spoke to Harlan Ames, the security chief also agreed that the sleuthing expedition might turn up additional clues-and warned the young inventor to be on guard against danger at all times.

Tom called Admiral Hopkins again and got an official okay to investigate the Centurion mystery further on his own. Then he placed a transatlantic call to Monaco. After talking to various underlings, Tom at last was allowed to speak to Petrov Vaxilis. Tom introduced himself and spoke as if he had a business deal in mind.

“Our inventions at Swift Enterprises can be put to many uses-we’ve hardly scratched the surface,” Tom said truthfully. “A farsighted businessman like you, Mr. Vaxilis, might find it very profitable to work out a project with us.”

“I’m flattered that such a famous scientist as Tom Swift should call me,” said Vaxilis. “I am always interested in looking into profitable new ideas. Perhaps you could fly here for a chat.”

Tom accepted and promised to take off at once. Bud was eager when Tom asked him to come along.

“Will we take the Sky Queen, Tom?”

“No, the Sea Hound. If we turn up any leads, we might want to do some more undersea probing.”

In little less than an hour, the seacopter was jetting off to Europe at supersonic speed with a small crew aboard-its destination, Monte Carlo in the tiny principality of Monaco on the southern coast of France. They were over mid-ocean when Tom received a radio flash from Mr. Swift.

“Son, I just had a phone call from Sandy in Paris,” he reported.

“What’s up, Dad?”

“She says she has a lead on the Centurion sinking and thinks you ought to come at once.”

“Okay,” Tom replied. “Where’ll I meet her?”

“Orly Airport in Paris: I’ll call her back.”

It was not yet three p.m. when the seacopter entered the traffic pattern over Orly. Tom got permission to land, and the two boys were quickly passed through Customs. Sandy and Phyl were waiting to meet

them in the air terminal.

“Boy, this is great seeing you again!” Bud exclaimed as the teen-agers greeted one another.

“I just wish we could stay longer,” Tom added.

“You never can!” Sandy laughed and made a face. “Seriously, Tom, this may be important.”

She explained that while sightseeing in the Tuileries Gardens with Phyl, they had been approached by a mysterious stranger who said that he wanted to get in touch with Tom Swift.

“He told us he’d read that you were handling the Centurion salvage project,” Sandy went on, “and he said he might be able to give you some information. Then he gave me this token to convince you he wasn’t just a faker.”

Sandy opened her purse and took out a small piece of yellow metal. It appeared to be pure gold!

“Wow!” Bud exclaimed, wide-eyed. “I’ll bet it was cut off one of those gold ingots from the liner!”

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SECRET CRYPT

TOM examined the piece of gold. “We’d have to have this assayed to be sure it matched the stolen gold, but it does seem as if this sample might be from that Centurion bullion. How am I supposed to contact this fellow, Sandy?”

“He’ll call you at the Hotel Crillon at four.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

The four young people found a taxi and sped away from the airport. Soon they were driving down wide, tree-lined boulevards into the center of Paris. When they arrived at the Hotel Crillon, Tom introduced himself to the desk clerk. Then they settled down in the lobby to await the call.

Presently the clerk signaled with his hand. Tom hurried over to one of the lobby telephones.

“Tom Swift Jr. speaking.”

“Ah, thank you, monsieur. I hardly hoped to reach you so quickly.” The caller spoke with a heavy accent. “Are the police listening in?”

Tom assured him that they were not.

“Tres bien! You are a gentleman, monsieur -I trust you. Will you keep secret what I say?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t guarantee that,” Tom said.

“Can you guarantee me a ten-thousand-dollar reward if I give you information which will help to get back the gold and the famous statue stolen from the S.S. Centurion?”

Tom was amazed. “Stolen-from the sunken ship?” he stalled. When the caller said nothing, Tom went on cautiously, “I might-I’ll have to find out first. Where can I reach you?”

“Your face is known to me from newspaper pictures, Monsieur Swift. In one hour from now, start walking along the Champs- Elysees between the Rond Point and the Place de L’Etoile.”

Tom heard a receiver click. After hanging up, he placed a transatlantic call to Admiral Hopkins in Washington. The admiral was keenly interested when told of the mysterious offer.

“I’m sure that no information has leaked out from the Navy Department,” Hopkins said. “If this fellow already knows the Centurion was looted, he may know a lot more. Go ahead and talk to him, Tom. And you have my authority to promise the reward if his information pays off.”

An hour later, as Tom was strolling on the spacious Avenue Champs Elysees, he was tapped on the shoulder and saw a dark-complexioned man who looked as if he might be an Arab.

Monsieur Swift?”

“That’s right.”

The man suggested that they go to a sidewalk cafe. After a waiter had brought coffee, the informer said that he had been approached the day before by an American who was a complete stranger to him. The American had tried to interest him in smuggling a large quantity of gold into India.

“In India, you see, gold brings fabulous prices-if one can smuggle it past Customs. And it happens I operate a small trading vessel.” The man smirked slyly.

“Where was the gold coming from?” Tom asked.

“Ah, an interesting question. The American hinted he had salvaged much bullion from a sunken ship. He gave me the small sample as proof. By the way, may I have it back, Monsieur Swift?”

Tom returned the piece of gold to allay any suspicion. “You agreed to the deal?” he asked.

“Do I look like a fool? If this gold is from the Centurion, as I suspect, it is far too hot to handle. Also I feared the double-cross.”

“So you decided to double-cross him first.”

The man shrugged. “He never kept our second appointment, so I figure he went back to America. Then I read that your sister was in Paris, so I thought why not offer this information to Tom Swift for a modest reward?”

“Your Information won’t do me much good unless I can find that American,” Tom pointed out.

“Naturally.” The man turned back his coat collar, displaying a cleverly rigged lapel camera. “That is why I took his picture. In my business it pays to be most careful.” He took a photographic print out of his pocket and handed it to Tom. “There is an enlargement.”

Tom gasped. The photo was of Tristan Carlow.

“You know him, monsieur?” When Tom nodded, the informer smiled confidently and stood up. “When and if I read that the Centurion’s cargo has been recovered, I shall contact you in America and claim my ten-thousand-dollar reward then?”

Before Tom could stop him, the man disappeared into the passing crowd. Tom paid the check and returned to the hotel in a taxi. Bud and the girls were amazed when they heard his story.

“Does this mean you’ll go back home and concentrate on investigating Carlow?” Phyl asked.

Tom shook his head. “Could be that’s what someone wants me to do. But I think we’ll go ahead with our visit to Vaxilis. I feel sure he figures in the Centurion sinking.”

The four teen-agers taxied back to Orly Airport. Tom and Bud said good-bye to the girls and took off with their crew in the Sea Hound. En route south toward the Mediterranean, Tom radioed a full report to Ames at Enterprises.

“Do you think the guy was leveling?” Ames asked.

“I don’t know, Harlan. That piece of gold doesn’t prove much. Neither does his picture of Carlow—it might have been taken anywhere.”

“If the whole thing’s a plant by the real gang,” Ames mused, “how would they know we’ve already had Carlow under suspicion?”

“Maybe they don’t,” Tom reasoned. “But they may have seen my tiff with Carlow in London. And maybe they know from those newspaper rumors that he was interested in the Centurion salvage job. That would automatically make Car-low a swell choice for a fall guy if they were trying to direct suspicion to someone.”

“Hmm, could be,” Ames agreed. “On the other hand, if that Arab was working for the gang, would they risk tipping you off that the Centurion had been looted?”

“They might if they suspect I’m already wise to it. Anyhow, his story wouldn’t help us much. We still couldn’t prove the ship had been looted unless we found the loot.”

“Well, I’ll notify the Navy and the FBI,” Ames said. “And I’ll personally sit in when they interrogate Carlow.”

Soon the dazzlingly blue sea came into view, and a cluster of white and pastel buildings, many of them red-roofed. Tom landed at the Monte Carlo heliport in sight of the famous Opera House and Casino, fringed by tall palms.

A long, shiny black limousine was waiting to pick up the boys, with a uniformed chauffeur at the wheel. He drove them along the Quai des Etats-Unis, bordering the beautiful harbor. It was enclosed by a white stone jetty and crowded with yachts flying the flags of many nations.

“Where’s the Oceanographic Museum?” Tom asked.

“On that headland across the harbor, sir. The Royal Palace and government buildings are over there, too. That is Monaco-Ville, the capital.”

Tom expressed a desire to visit the museum, and also to meet its director, the famous undersea explorer, Captain Cousteau.

“I am sure Monsieur Vaxilis would be happy to arrange it, sir,” the chauffeur murmured.

The car headed up into the gray-green hills above Monte Carlo. Presently it passed through a tall iron gateway and stopped before a huge pink villa surrounded by poplars and mimosa.

A courtly-looking man in a white suit, with graying dark hair, came out to meet them. “I am Petrov Vaxilis. Welcome to my home, gentlemen.”

Tom noticed that their host spoke with an Oxford accent. Vaxilis explained that he had been educated in England and spent a great deal of time there. The boys were shown to a guest room with twin beds. Then their host guided them around his beautiful gardens until a butler announced dinner.

As they were eating, Vaxilis remarked casually to Tom, “I understand you are supervising the salvage of the Centurion. A most challenging assignment, I should imagine.”

Tom merely smiled. “Challenging, yes. But possibly hopeless, wouldn’t you say?”

Vaxilis shrugged. Tom changed the subject and began talking about mining the lumps of manganese which are found on the sea floor—often in beds worth several million dollars per square mile. Tom spoke as if he might be broaching a project. Vaxilis showed interest but suggested they wait until tomorrow to talk business.

After dinner Tom asked to see Vaxilis’ art collection. As they went from room to room, their host pointed out the various paintings, sculptures, and tapestries, which were tastefully displayed.

Tom pretended to be puzzled. “I thought your collection was much larger, Mr. Vaxilis. I don’t see some of the paintings which I’ve read you own.”

“My collection is so large that much of it is kept stored in an underground vault,” Vaxilis replied. “The items on display are rotated.”

He spoke smoothly, but Tom noticed that he did not offer to show them the vault. This intrigued the young inventor. Later, when he and Bud had retired to their room, Tom said:

“Are you game for some midnight maneuvers?”

Bud grinned. “What’s on the schedule?”

“This is strictly nonscheduled. I’d like to take a peek inside Mr. V’s underground vault.”

“Who could resist you know I’m an art buff!”

When they were sure the household was asleep, they crept quietly downstairs. Tom led the way with a flashlight. The villa was wrapped in silence, but both boys' pulses were hammering with suspense.

Reaching the kitchen, they descended a back stairway into an arched stone cellar. The beam from Tom's flashlight disclosed a cobwebby array of casks, a furnace, an air conditioner, and a workshop area stocked with tools, but no sign of any doorway.

"How do we get into the vault?" Bud asked.

"Maybe there's a secret entrance somewhere on the grounds," Tom said. "Let's look around here first."

The two boys made a circuit of the cellar, tapping the walls and inspecting the floor for signs of a trap door. Bud grew discouraged when they failed to find any sign of the vault.

"Looks hopeless to me-unless Vaxilis squirms into his vault through a drainpipe."

As he spoke, Bud absent-mindedly toed a round drain plate in the floor. The next instant both boys gasped as a section of the wall swung open!

"You've found it!" Tom exclaimed, shining his beam into the opening. "That drain plate must conceal a pressure switch!"

Bud, eager and curious, started to plunge through the opening. But Tom restrained him. "Hold it! Let's not walk into any traps!"

Tom flashed his light around the secret room. He saw rows of framed paintings neatly racked like film slides. A white sheet covered what appeared to be a statue. Tom could detect nothing sinister about the room. "Okay-but wait till I fix this door so it can't swing shut."

Tom got a chisel from the workbench and wedged the door open. The two boys entered the room. Tom lifted the sheet from the statue, then swept it off with a cry of excitement.

"Bud! It's the Delian Apollo!"

"Roarin" rockets! We really hit the jackpot!"

"Keep a lookout," Tom ordered, "while I look over some of these paintings."

Before leaving Enterprises, Tom had had Miss Trent, the Swifts' secretary, check with the Shop ton Museum and compile a list of famous paintings which had been stolen from European owners or galleries. Almost immediately Tom found two of them a Frans Hals and a Matisse.

"This cinches it!" Tom exclaimed. "Vaxilis must be the mastermind who--"

His words were cut short by a cry from Bud. Tom whirled around just in time to see a steel partition slide down with a thud over the doorway. They were trapped in the vault!

A moment later a peephole opened in the partition. Vaxilis' face grinned in at them!

## CHAPTER XV

### PRISONERS

“FORGIVE me, gentlemen, if I find the situation amusing.” Vaxilis leered at the imprisoned boys. “You see, whenever the wall section opens to this crypt, it flashes an alarm to several points around the villa-including my bedroom. A hidden microphone also picked up your voices.”

“Of all the rotten luck!” Bud muttered between clenched teeth.

Vaxilis laughed. “You would have been trapped even if no one were in the villa. This steel partition comes down automatically minutes after the vault is opened, unless the person who enters presses a concealed ‘safe’ button.”

“You don’t seem surprised,” Tom remarked.

“No, indeed,” Vaxilis replied. “Three days ago I learned from an Italian firm, of which I am a director, that the police had been making inquiries about a certain undersea lamp. Then I received a call from you-the brilliant young hydronaut in charge of salvaging the Centurion-and the person most likely to have found the lamp that was stupidly left behind. You wished to see me on a trumped-up excuse. It was not difficult to put two and two together.”

Tom clenched his fists bitterly. What a fool he had been not to realize that Vaxilis would be watching his every move.

“All right, you seem to have the upper hand,” Tom said. “What do you intend to do now?”

“You leave me no choice. You have found the Delian Apollo-not to mention certain other -shall we say?-borrowed masterpieces. What else can I do but get rid of you both-permanently.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Bud blurted out. “Too many people know we came here! You could never explain our disappearance!”

Vaxilis’ lips shaped an evil smile. “Ah! Now there I must disagree! You see, we are all going for a pleasure cruise on my yacht, the Naiad-you will choose to enjoy some nighttime Mediterranean skin diving. But, alas, both of you will be drowned ‘accidentally’ -one trying to rescue the other. And when I inform the authorities of your foolish decision and sad fate”-Vaxilis shrugged -“who will contradict me?”

Tom and Bud felt an icy chill of fear. The man was ruthless and his deadly plan seemed foolproof! Vaxilis glanced at the young inventor.

“It may be, my dear Swift, that I shall allow you to buy your life, provided you agree to use your scientific genius to help me on future projects similar to the sinking of the Centurion.”

Tom stared back defiantly. “If you think I’d ever help you endanger the lives of hundreds of innocent people, you’re crazier than you seem!”

Vaxilis' eyes hardened. "As you wish. In any case, it might be too dangerous to trust you."

The steel partition slid upward. Tom and Bud now saw that their host was accompanied by the chauffeur, the butler, and two burly henchmen. The strong-arm men—one thick-chested and apelike, the other a tall, muscular, bald-headed man—advanced, grinning, into the crypt.

"Okay," Bud gritted, "if these guys want some exercise, let's give it to 'em, Tom!"

Bud swung hard at the apelike man and Tom greeted his partner with a left. Both men countered like judoists, and after a violent struggle, subdued the boys. Then Tom's and Bud's hands were tied behind them.

Tom glanced around desperately at Vaxilis' four employees. "How stupid can you get!" he exploded. "Don't you realize your boss is playing you all for fools? He wants us out of the way to save his neck. If you help him, you'll be putting your own necks in a noose!"

The two strong-arm men laughed sneeringly. The chauffeur's face remained coldly masklike. Only the butler's eyes betrayed a flicker of fear. Vaxilis gave Tom a hard backhand slap.

"That will be enough out of you!" To his men the tycoon barked, "Get them out of here— fast!"

Tom and Bud were herded upstairs, then outside and into the back seat of the limousine. The two strong-arm men climbed in with them. Vaxilis and the chauffeur seated themselves in front. A moment later the butler came hurrying out of the villa, bringing the boys' sport jackets.

"Put those around their shoulders so it cannot be seen that their hands are tied," Vaxilis ordered his henchmen. To Tom and Bud he added menacingly, "The slightest outcry will result in several inches of sharp steel between your ribs."

The strong-arm men fingered thin, stiletto-like knives. The time was now past midnight. They drove down the steep, winding roadway into Monte Carlo, then out along the quay. The car stopped at the stern of a big, sleek yacht.

"A single false move and you will die in your tracks," Vaxilis muttered to the prisoners.

Tom and Bud were removed from the car. Several of the yachts moored nearby were lighted up. But they were occupied by merrymakers who showed no interest in what was happening elsewhere. Each guard put an arm around one boy in a seemingly friendly way, but their grip was viselike.

Two by two, the boys and their captors crossed the gangplank onto the yacht's fantail. Vaxilis brought up the rear. A man in captain's uniform saluted smartly as he stepped aboard.

Vaxilis glanced over the Naiad proudly. In the moonlit darkness Tom and Bud could sense the vessel's gleaming, spit-and-polish condition.

"Too bad you will be unable to enjoy this cruise," Vaxilis murmured gloatingly. "Naiad is the finest, fastest yacht afloat. She was built in England to my own specifications. Her crew, too, were all trained in British ships."

"Who trained them to backstop your crimes?" Bud asked.



Vaxilis scowled. "Have this lout taken below decks," he told the captain. "Put the other one in my cabin-I wish to talk to him after we get underway. We will cast off immediately."

"Aye, aye, sir. Will you be coming up on the bridge?"

"Not yet. I must go to the radio shack and make several radiotelephone calls to inform my business subordinates of this trip. Meanwhile, set your own course."

The captain saluted again and snapped out orders for the henchmen to go ashore. Then he turned to the seamen of the deck watch. All wore blue-denim trousers and white T-shirts with their ship's name in blue letters across the chest. Two of them hustled Bud down a hatchway. Another took Tom to a cabin amidships, thrust him inside the unlighted room, and locked the door.

Presently Tom heard the crew casting off, then the muted throb of the yacht's diesel engines. By now his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. The faint glow of moonlight through the portholes enabled him to make out the contents of the cabin. It was furnished with armchairs, a bunk and nightstand, a table, and a desk.

How could he get free? Tom's brain worked frantically. Perhaps the desk might offer some tool for escape! Tom strode over to it. Fortunately the desk was located under a porthole, so the objects on it were fairly visible.

Almost at once Tom noticed a penknife. It did not look sharp enough to cut his bonds, and besides, how could he brace it in position to saw through his wrist cords? Suddenly his attention was drawn to a heavy paperweight. It gave Tom an idea.

There was a lamp on the nightstand. Tom grasped the paperweight and walked toward the bunk. As he had hoped, the lamp was attached rigidly to the nightstand. Tom plucked off the shade with his teeth. Then he turned around, and, with his arms thrust out in back of him, he managed to shatter the light bulb.

Tom waited for a moment, holding his breath. Evidently the sound had not been heard. Maneuvering awkwardly, Tom began to saw his wrist cords over the jagged glass of the bulb stump. He cut himself twice but at last he was free.

Now to find Bud! "It would sure help if I had something with which to defend myself," Tom thought.

He hastily groped through the drawer of the nightstand, then the desk drawers. In one of them he found a flashlight. Tom switched it on cautiously, holding one hand over the lens, and continued his search.

In the cabin locker he found an assortment of skin-diving gear, including a rubber suit. Tom rummaged about for a spear gun or a knife.

Suddenly he heard footsteps on the deck outside. He turned off the flashlight, and tiptoed to the nightstand. As a key turned in the lock, Tom stood with his back to the lamp to hide the broken bulb-hands behind him as if still tied.

The door opened. Vaxilis entered and flicked a light switch. "Now, Tom Swift, you and I are going to have a little chat," the tycoon said. "Your friend will never leave this ship alive-he is merely a nuisance. But there is still a chance to save yourself if you cooperate."

As Vaxilis moved toward him, Tom's right fist lashed out in a smashing uppercut. Vaxilis sank to the

deck, unconscious.

There was not a moment to waste. Tom shed his clothes and donned the skin-diving gear. Fortunately, he and Vaxilis were about the same size. "With the hood and mask on, I may be able to pass for Vaxilis in the darkness and save Bud," Tom said to himself.

He adjusted the mask loosely for nose breathing. Then he emptied the batteries from an underwater flashlight, inserted his pencil radio, and tucked the case into a weight-belt pocket.

Tom stepped out of the cabin and started aft. To his dismay, a crewman emerged from the radio shack directly in his path!

The man looked too swarthy to be English, but if the crew had sailed in British ships, Tom reasoned he must understand the language. Tom spoke in a low voice, imitating Vaxilis' accent. "I am going to get rid of our prisoners in a way that will look like an accident. Bring the other boy topside-and some more diving gear."

The sailor hesitated, then murmured, "Aye, aye, sir," and turned to obey. But suddenly he halted as if he had spotted something on the deck. He beckoned Tom toward him and exclaimed excitedly in some foreign language.

Tom froze for a moment, wondering how to respond. To stall for time he took a few steps closer. Too late he realized the sailor's ruse. As Tom came within the glow of light from the radio shack, the man lunged and grabbed him!

"You are not Vaxilis!" the sailor hissed. Then he shouted:

"Help! Tom Swift is escaping!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### A GRUESOME FOE

TOM reacted like lightning. There was no longer any chance to free Bud-at best he could only hope to fight his own way to freedom. Tom wrenched his arms loose and brought both fists up hard under the man's jaw with a bone-cracking thud. The sailor staggered backward and fell.

The radioman had already rushed out of his shack, and other crewmen were running to the scene. Tom leaped over the rail and dived headfirst into the water!

He surfaced to tighten his mask and shove his air-lung mouthpiece between his teeth. Shouts rang out through the darkness as the Naiad reversed her engines. A moment later came a ragged volley of gunfire, and bullets began spraying the water. But Tom had submerged again and was stroking away from the yacht at high speed.

The young hydronaut was swimming in total darkness, except for occasional patches of luminescence that lighted up the water. Tom avoided these, for fear of pursuit by skin divers from the Naiad armed with spear guns.

“Hope I’m heading the right way!” he thought. Tom was navigating by instinct, doing his best to maintain a straight course. Before leaping overboard, he had noticed that the lights of Monaco had dropped far astern, and that the few twinkles from the shoreline came from the starboard quarter, which meant the yacht had been heading roughly southwest. But Tom dared not surface again to check his own bearings.

“They may be hunting for me with sonar!” Tom realized suddenly. Should he take evasive action by zigzagging? “Better not,” he decided. It was more important to conserve his strength and his air supply for the long swim ashore.

Minutes went by that seemed like hours. At last Tom judged that he must be nearing the coast. He sheared upward to the surface. Sure enough, he could make out the shoreline dead ahead. Treading water, Tom glanced all around. The Naiad was nowhere in sight. Evidently her crew had doused all running lights.

Tom was about to proceed ashore when another thought occurred to him. What if Vaxilis’ men had already landed and were waiting to ambush him? “No use taking a chance,” Tom decided.

Wearily he began swimming eastward. After a mile or so, Tom made out a small rocky cove and felt he had veered far enough from his original shoreward course to risk a landing.

Tom swam into the cove. The water here was still deep. Tom groped for a handhold to clamber out over the rocks. But his right swim fin seemed to have caught in a crevice.

Tom started to yank his foot free, then gasped in horror. The moonlight and a sheen of phosphorescence illuminating the crystal-blue water revealed the ugly snout of a moray eel. It had been lurking in a rock cranny, and its jaws had snapped tight on the rubber flipper 1

As Tom struggled to free himself, the eel came surging out of its hole—a monster fully six feet long. Tom dared not reach down and try to unfasten his fin, knowing the moray’s razor-sharp teeth could rake his fingers to the bone at a single slash. In any case, the rubber was stretching and would soon be ripped away.

The moray was thrashing viciously, stirring up a brilliant foam of phosphorescence. Tom whipped out his skin-diver’s knife and stabbed it deep behind the monster’s head. The water darkened with a gush of blood. But instead of loosening its bite, the moray lashed wildly and wrapped itself around Tom’s leg.

At any moment, as the fin tore away, the creature might let go the rubber and sink its fangs into his flesh. Shuddering, Tom stabbed at the eel twice more. At last the coil around his leg relaxed, and the moray sank out of sight.

Tom clambered out of the water and flopped down on the rocky beach, exhausted.

For a few minutes he lay panting and shivering in the night air. What to do now? If he radioed the Sea Hound, the Naiad might pick up his signal. Tom knew that a highway, the Basse Corniche Road, closely paralleled the coast west of Monaco. But flagging a ride and explaining to the police might waste precious time—and cost Bud’s life.

“I’ll call the Sea Hound!” Tom decided.

Quickly Tom removed his pencil radio from the waterproof flashlight case, switched on the two-way transmitter, and began calling the sea-copter. Hank Sterling’s voice responded urgently, “Skipper! What happened? Are you all right?”

“I am, but I’m not sure about Bud,” Tom replied. “Did you know something was wrong?”

“We sure did. We’ve been worried sick! Vaxilis’ butler rammed his car into a building in Monte Carlo on his way to the police. He already had a bullet wound and got smashed up badly in the accident. By the time the cops got to him, he was just able to gasp out that Vaxilis had kidnapped you and Bud, then he passed out. The police went to Vaxilis’ place and found everyone gone, so they notified us.”

“Wow! This case has really blown wide open!” Tom gasped. He filled Hank in hastily on all that had happened and explained the mechanism of the secret vault. “Notify the police and tell them to search the vault right away. They’ll find the Delian Apollo there and at least two other stolen masterpieces. Then get here fast and pick me up.

We must find Vaxilis’ yacht before anything happens to Bud!”

“Wilco!” Hank promised. “Keep sending and we’ll home in on your signal!”

Fifteen minutes later the Sea Hound came zooming in low over the water. Its search beam swept the shore and pinpointed Tom’s arm-waving figure. Soon he was safely aboard. Chow clucked and fussed over his young boss.

“Brand my clam chowder, Tom, you get into worse scrapes than a loco bull calf! Do you reckon we can find them low-down sidewinders what bushwhacked you and Bud?”

“We’re sure going to try, old-timer!”

Tom changed into dry clothes, then took the Sea Hound’s controls and submerged outside the cove to periscope depth. As soon as he had identified his own trail on the readout panel of the aquatomic tracker, Tom tuned the proper elements on the TC and switched to automatic pilot.

The seacopter streaked away from shore. It slowed to a halt when they reached the spot where Tom had leaped overboard from the yacht. Here the tracker picked up the Naiad’s trail, and the real pursuit began.

At first the Sea Hound headed back to shore on a zigzag course. Then it turned seaward again.

“This must be where they gave up chasing me,” Tom murmured.

“I still don’t see where the butler fits into the picture, skipper,” Hank said thoughtfully.

“He looked scared when I told Vaxilis’ goons that they were risking their own necks to save their boss,” Tom recalled. “Probably he lost his nerve later and tried to pull out when those strong-arm men got back to the villa-but the others shot him as he was getting away. Then they ducked out, too, realizing the police would soon show up.”

“That figures,” Hank agreed.

The Sea Hound was now heading southwest. Although the Naiad had a long head start, and Vaxilis had boasted of her speed, Tom felt confident the seacopter could overtake her.

Some time later the sonarman spoke up tensely, “Blip dead ahead, skipper I Could be the yacht!”

Tom turned to the scope. The blip was growing larger. “I’ll bet that’s our baby, all right!”

Presently he switched to manual control and surfaced cautiously. The sky was pink with dawn. Directly in front of them, about half a mile away, the Naiad lay still in the water.

“What do we do now?” Hank asked.

“Close in and give ‘em a hail,” Tom replied. “If Bud’s still alive, they may try to use him as a hostage, but at least they won’t dare to carry out Vaxilis’ original plan of drowning both of us.”

The Sea Hound glided alongside. Tom was puzzled by no sign of life above decks. He tried calling the yacht by radio but got no response.

“Guess I’ll have to go topside,” Tom decided.

“This may be a trick, boss,” Chow warned.

“You show your head and they may gun you down!”

“There’s no other way, Chow. We can’t just sit here and do nothing.”

Tom opened the hatch and climbed up onto the seacopter’s hull. He scanned the yacht anxiously, but no one showed at the rail. Nor was anyone visible on the bridge.

“Ahoy the Naiad!” he shouted. No answer. Again Tom shouted-this time at the top of his lungs. Again there was no response.

Tom felt a chill of foreboding. What had happened to Bud and his captors aboard the yacht?

## CHAPTER XVII

### VANISHED EVIDENCE

“WHAT’S the score?” Hank asked as Tom climbed back into the cabin of the seacopter.

“The yacht seems deserted. They may be laying a trap, but there’s only one way to find out.”

Tom adjusted the rotor and the Sea Hound rose from the water. Tom guided her into hovering position above the Naiad’s foredeck and a ladder was dropped. Then Tom turned over the controls to a

crewman and climbed down onto the yacht, followed by Hank, Chow, and another man.

“Hank, you and Jerry start aft,” Tom ordered. “Chow and I will start forward.”

“Roger!”

The bridge, cabins, radio compartment, and galley were all thoroughly searched. Then the boarding party went below and tried the engine room, supply lockers, crew’s quarters, and stowage spaces. Even the bilges and double bottom were checked. As a last resort, they peered under the tarpaulins covering the lifeboats. But there was no trace of the Naiad’s crew or passengers.

“What do you make of it, skipper?” Hank asked.

“Looks as if Vaxilis has pulled another fast one.” Tom’s voice was grim. “Wherever he and his crew have gone, let’s hope Bud’s with them!”

Back on the Sea Hound, Tom radioed Enterprises. He told the operator to contact Harlan Ames at once and also Admiral Hopkins in Washington.

“This is urgent,” Tom said. “Arrange a three-way hookup with scramblers and call me back as soon as Ames and Admiral Hopkins are ready to talk.”

While waiting for the radio call, Tom made a quick check of the waters around the yacht with his aquatomic tracker. But he found no sign that any other surface vessel or submarine had rendezvoused with the Naiad.

Presently a voice crackled from the radio speaker: “Enterprises calling Sea Hound!”

Tom hurriedly responded and was soon exchanging greetings with Harlan Ames and Admiral Hopkins. The young inventor told them all that had happened at Vaxilis’ villa and aboard the Naiad.

“This is awful, Tom,” Hopkins said. “I know how you feel. Even the recovery of the Apollo won’t make up for any harm to your friend.”

“I’ll get a CIA man and fly over in the Sky Queen immediately,” Ames promised. “Incidentally, Tristan Carlow has disappeared.”

Tom frowned at this unexpected development. Was Carlow in league with Vaxilis? “We’d better not tip our hand for the time being,” he said after a moment’s thought. “If possible, I’d like it to appear the Naiad was discovered in a routine search by some vessel other than the Sea Hound.”

“I’ll have a ship from our Mediterranean fleet dispatched to the scene at once,” Hopkins said.

After arranging to meet Ames in Monte Carlo, Tom signed off. Twenty minutes later a U.S. Navy jet fighter flew over and waggled its wings. In another hour, a destroyer from Ville franche reached the scene. Tom spoke to her skipper, then took off in the Sea Hound, leaving the destroyer to tow the Naiad to port.

As soon as he landed at Monte Carlo, Tom found a taxi and sped to Monaco Police Headquarters, which was humming with activity. The chief of police exclaimed in relief at sight of the young inventor and clutched Tom’s hand fervently.

“Thank heavens you are safe, monsieur! We should never have forgiven ourselves if anything had happened to the great Tom Swift!”

His expression changed when Tom reported that Bud was still missing and that Vaxilis and his crew had vanished. “We, too, have bad news, Monsieur Swift. We searched the vault at the villa as soon as we received your tip. But, alas, we could find neither the Delian Apollo nor any other stolen art masterpieces.”

Tom was dismayed. “Vaxilis must have radio-telephoned his villa as soon as I escaped!”

“Out-to warn them. No doubt he learned about the butler at the same time, and ordered his henchmen to remove all incriminating evidence.”

The police chief added that the butler was in critical condition at the hospital.

“Vaxilis possessed three cars,” the chief went on. “The butler smashed up one, and the other two have been found parked outside a hangar where Vaxilis maintained a private helicopter. Needless to say, the helicopter is gone.”

“Have you been able to trace it?” Tom asked.

“Not yet. The hours of darkness, of course, gave them ample time to carry out their escape with little chance of detection.”

By noon Ames and a CIA man had arrived from the Nice airport, and also an inspector of the French Surete from Paris, accompanied by a man from Interpol, the International Police Organization. A conference was held immediately.

“It’s obvious the helicopter was used to remove everyone from the yacht,” Tom pointed out.

“You think they were landed somewhere ashore, monsieur?” put in the man from Interpol.

Tom shrugged. “Possibly, though in that case I should think the helicopter would have been spotted by now. They may have transferred at sea to another ship and sunk the copter to keep us from ever finding it.”

“The important thing now is to try to guess Vaxilis’ next move,” Ames remarked. “He can certainly hire the best legal talent to defend him. Do you think he may come back and try to bluff his way out of this situation?”

“I can assure you he would be a fool to try it, monsieur,” said the chief of police in a steely voice. “Monaco does not tolerate such crimes. At the very least, with the testimony of his own butler and of Monsieur Swift, Vaxilis could certainly be convicted of kidnapping-which would mean life imprisonment.”

“And if Monsieur Swift’s friend has been killed in French territorial waters, Vaxilis would face the guillotine,” added the Surete inspector. “In any case, the Naiad itself is of British registry, and if I know Scotland Yard, he would certainly go to the gallows unless he could produce Monsieur Barclay safe and sound.”

The Monegasque police chief nodded. “I doubt very much that Vaxilis will give himself up. With a

fortune in gold and priceless art, why should he risk a trial that might cost him his life or freedom? A financial genius like Vaxilis could always find ways to cash in his holdings secretly, while remaining undercover.”

“But wait a minute,” Tom broke in excitedly. “If the butler was shot getting away from the villa, Vaxilis won’t know for sure whether he lived to talk to the police. He doesn’t even know whether I reached shore alive.”

The police officials regarded Tom with a stir of interest.

“Exactly what are you suggesting, monsieur?”

“Suppose we keep Vaxilis in the dark by not revealing that I survived or that the butler talked,” Tom said. “If Vaxilis thought there was no one to testify against him, maybe he would risk showing up and try to bluff his way out!”

Ames, his associates, and the European police officials were impressed. After talking it over, they agreed Tom’s plan offered the best hope of bringing Vaxilis out in the open. As yet, the Monaco police had given no hint to the press that the butler’s accident might be connected with a sensational crime.

Tom immediately taxied back to the Sea Hound, which then put to sea beyond reach of reporters. Meanwhile, a news story was given out that Vaxilis’ butler had been mysteriously wounded and involved in a car accident and was still unconscious.

When police went to inform his master, the story went on, they found Vaxilis’ villa deserted. Its occupants—including the famous hydronauts, Tom Swift and Bud Barclay—had vanished. Vaxilis’ yacht and helicopter were also missing. No mention was made of the Delian Apollo, nor of the other stolen masterpieces.

Tom, grim with worry, and his associates waited tensely for developments. When no clue to Vaxilis’ whereabouts had materialized after forty-eight hours, Ames persuaded them all to fly back to the United States.

There was nothing to do now but stand by patiently while Interpol put out a worldwide dragnet for the fugitives. The FBI, meanwhile, was still unable to locate Tristan Carlow.

Tom stayed in seclusion on Fearing Island, letting the newspapers believe that he too had disappeared with all the others on the yacht. Ames and the Swift family, who were in on the plan to lure Vaxilis out of hiding, refused any comment to the press.

Two more days dragged by. Tom chafed at his forced inactivity and tried to forget his worry over Bud by puttering in his laboratory. But he was unable to concentrate. At last he snatched up the telephone and called Harlan Ames at Enterprises.

“What’s up?” the security chief asked.

“Nothing—that’s the whole trouble,” Tom replied. “Harlan, I have a scheme to bait a trap for Vaxilis.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### SONAR SIGNAL

AMES had a well-developed respect for Tom's "schemes." He knew the young inventor would not have called unless he had a shrewd and well-thought-out plan for trapping his enemy.

"Okay, skipper-I'll fly over right away."

Within half an hour Ames was jeeping to Tom's laboratory from the island airfield. When they were seated together, Tom began:

"Harlan, I think it's hopeless to wait any longer for Vaxilis to show himself."

"Do you figure he has found out that you survived?" Ames asked.

"Probably. And he's too smart to take any chances."

"The butler, by the way, is recovering and has made a full statement, backing up your charges."

"Vaxilis will get wind of that eventually," Tom said. "And he's certain to find out about me, too, if he hasn't already done so."

"I'm afraid you're right," Ames agreed.

"Besides, with the butler's testimony about the Delian Apollo, we might even scrape up enough evidence to pin the sinking of the Centurion on him-especially- if any of his other henchmen break down and talk. And that's one rap he'd find too hot to beat."

"We know he used a submarine," Ames mused. "As a big shipping tycoon, he might have had one built undercover. For all outward appearances it could have been for one of the smaller countries-with some phony story about a sinking on its trial run all cooked up if anyone ever checked."

"Or as an armaments broker, Vaxilis could have bought one secondhand from some naval power and converted it to atomic design," Tom pointed out. "Either way, it could be tough to track down if he handled the deal through secret middlemen."

"So what's your plan, skipper?"

Tom got up from his lab stool and began pacing restlessly back and forth. "Harlan, our only hope of rescuing Bud is to bait a trap with something Vaxilis-can't resist."

"Such as?"

"Another art masterpiece."

Ames stared in surprise. "Are you serious?"

“Dead serious,” Tom declared. “Dad is a business friend of the millionaire who endowed the Abingdon Art Museum in Baltimore. Among their canvases is a famous Rembrandt.”

“A Rembrandt!” Ames let out a whistle. “You don’t think the museum would let us fool around with a priceless painting like that!”

“The painting would never leave the museum. All we need is their cooperation to make Vaxilis think it’s being sent out of the U.S.A. to Kabulistan.”

The Shah of Kabulistan, a small Middle Eastern country, had been a good friend of the Swifts ever since Tom had carried out a project to industrialize his nation. He was also an avid art collector. Tom explained that the museum could announce it was selling the Rembrandt to the Shah. Naturally the news stories would include details on when and how the painting was to be shipped abroad.

“Ostensibly the painting will be sent on a freighter bound for the Persian Gulf with other goods destined for Kabulistan,” Tom continued. “When the ship puts to sea, I’ll trail it in the Sea Hound-and wait for Vaxilis to strike.”

Ames was astounded at the daring scheme. “What about the freighter?” he asked. “It might be sunk if you don’t detect the enemy in time.”

“From the bomb damage to the Centurion, I’m positive the explosion took place inside the ship,” Tom replied, “which means the bomb must have been planted aboard while the ship was still in port. If Vaxilis goes for our bait, he’ll probably try the same trick this time.”

“But we’ll be watching, and remove the bomb before the freighter puts to sea-is that it?”

“Right.”

“That still doesn’t tell us who’s going to provide the freighter,” Ames objected.

“I have a hunch Admiral Hopkins can help us with that,” Tom said. “Also with the crew.”

The young inventor phoned Washington, and Admiral Hopkins flew to Fearing Island to discuss the scheme. The Navy man was enthusiastic.

“Tom, that’s the kind of strategy which wins battles!” Hopkins declared. “Feint your enemy into a move and then clobber him-!”

“The plan may not work,” Tom cautioned. “Vaxilis is cunning-he’s already hiding out from the law-and he may scent a trap. But we know he has a mania for art masterpieces and he’ll stop at nothing to obtain them. I’m gambling that the Rembrandt will be too juicy a prize for him to pass up.”

“And I’m convinced your scheme’s worth a try,” the admiral assured Tom. “There are freighters in the Maritime Administration’s Reserve Fleets waiting to be scrapped. We can borrow one of those. In fact, one had been leased to a private shipping firm and still bears their name. That should fool Vaxilis. I’ll arrange matters with the president of the shipping company.”

“How about a crew?” Ames put in.

“Navy regulars-I’ll issue a confidential call for volunteers,” Hopkins promised. “The man we’re after is a

public enemy who's sunk an ocean liner, endangered hundreds of innocent lives, and stolen fifteen millions in federal bullion. Someday he may strike again. I'd say it's worth plenty of risk to stop him."

Events moved fast in the next few days. The Maritime Administration willingly provided the surplus freighter. Spruced up and freshly painted and still bearing the stack stripes of the private shipping line-the S.S. Jason Rockwell came steaming into Baltimore and tied up at a pier.

Crates stenciled for shipment to Kabulistan were loaded aboard. None of the longshoremen who handled them was aware that the crates were filled with rusty scrap.

Meanwhile, the Abingdon Art Museum had cooperated by releasing a news story that it was selling its Rembrandt to the Shah of Kabulistan who had agreed privately to help out with the scheme. The announcement caused a storm of indignation in the press. The museum's founder, Julius K. Abingdon, replied that the museum needed funds to enlarge its collection of modern and primitive art. Tom felt sure the news would reach Vaxilis wherever he might be hiding.

An object that looked like a crated painting, with waterproof, fireproof covering, was trucked from the museum to the pier and loaded aboard the Rockwell, which was constantly guarded for intruders. Navy frogmen kept a watch underwater for any attempt to attach a bomb to the ship's hull. Guards were also stationed on the dock- but told to look as if they were keeping a careless watch. All but three of the crew were ashore on liberty.

The Sea Hound, meanwhile, was lurking in Chesapeake Bay. The night before the Rockwell was to sail, Tom received a radio call from Ames.

"Looks as if Vaxilis has taken the bait!" Ames reported excitedly. "A bomb was planted aboard the Rockwell at eleven-fifteen. We've disarmed it, and the FBI's tailing the saboteur to pick up confederates-but there'll be no arrest until we hear from you."

Tom was jubilant. "Great news, Harlan! Now keep your fingers crossed and wish us luck!"

Next day the Rockwell left its pier and steamed slowly out of the harbor. The Sea Hound shadowed it down the bay and out to sea. As the afternoon wore on, Tom and his crew kept a close watch with their sonar gear and hydrophones for any sign of an enemy sub.

Night fell. Shortly before ten o'clock, Arv Hanson, who was monitoring the hydrophones, called out, "Skipper, it just started all of a sudden! This must be about the time the bomb was supposed to go off."

Arv flicked a switch. From the hydrophone loud-speaker came a steady beat: Plonk! . . . Plonk! . . . Plonk! . . . Plonk!

"That's a sonar pulse!" Tom exclaimed. "Where's it coming from, Arv?"

"Dead ahead. Must be from the Rockwell."

Tom frowned in puzzlement, then his face clouded with dismay. "Vaxilis may have outsmarted us!"

"How do you figure that?" Hank Sterling asked.

"If I'm right, he learned that his bomb was disarmed and thought up another scheme. That pulse is a signal to help the fiends track the Rockwell. An enemy frogman must have attached a signaling device

and a delayed-action bomb to the ship's hull while she was moored back in port!"

"But I thought the Navy was keeping an underwater watch?" Arv objected.

"They were," Tom replied. "But they probably secured the watch-I mean, called in their frogmen-after they nipped that bomb attempt in Baltimore. I believe that a bomb will blow a hole in the Rockwell's hull sometime tonight!"

Suddenly the sonarman sang out, "Blip on the port quarter, skipper! It's up topside!"

Was it the enemy?

Anxiously Tom studied the sonarscope. The ship was approaching steadily. The throb of its screws became audible as Arv trained the hydrophones.

Presumably Vaxilis would be using a submarine, not a surface ship. Or was this another of his unexpected tricks?

Tom dared not take a chance. He sent the Sea Hound zooming toward the surface and upped the periscope for a look at the mystery vessel. In the darkness, nothing was visible.

Puzzled, Tom eased the seacopter above the waves for a direct view through the cabin window. The moonlight glinted on something protruding from the water. "It's a sub operating at periscope depth!" Tom realized.

The Rockwell must be warned at once! Her crew had been drilled for any emergency-but how much time remained before the bomb might explode?

"Get the Rockwell on the radio, Hank!" Tom ordered. "Tell her skipper to abandon ship pronto! We'll pick up the crew!"

"Skipper, the enemy has fired a torpedo at us!" the sonarman shouted.

Tom grabbed the controls and swerved the Sea Hound hard aport, swinging her stern clear of the missile's course. An instant later the seacopter rocked from a terrific underwater explosion!

## CHAPTER XIX

### DANGER TRAIL

TOM and his crewmates were hurled to the deck as the blast shook the Sea Hound from stem to stern. Although the torpedo had missed them -and the seacopter was protected by sonar-blinding sheathing-it was obvious what had happened. Once they had surfaced, the enemy must have detected them by radar and set the torpedo to explode automatically at the measured range.

“Check for leaks, Arv!” Tom cried out. He rushed to the controls. Hank was already fumbling at the communications console.

“The radio’s dead, skipper!” he reported. “The blast must have knocked it out!”

Almost at the same moment, Tom realized that the steering jets were not answering.

“Another torpedo!” came the warning shout.

Tom glimpsed the missile’s foaming wake and took the only escape route open. There was no time to reverse rotor-blade pitch and get the seacopter aloft. Instead, Tom slammed the control wheel forward. Down plunged the Sea Hound.

“Let’s hope we’re still watertight!” Tom murmured, and uttered a silent prayer.

Instants later came the dull reverberation of the torpedo exploding above them. This time all hands had braced themselves for the blast. Tom maintained his grip on the control wheel and kept the Sea Hound plummeting downward.

Presently Arv returned from his inspection trip aft. “No sign of a leak, skipper!”

Tom nodded grimly. Only the tremendous strength of their hull had saved them from destruction. And they were still not out of danger if the enemy sub should dive in pursuit.

“How far down are we going?” Hank asked.

“All the way.”

After tense moments the Sea Hound landed on the ocean floor. Tom shut off the atomic turbine. Even the ping of their sonar-search pulse might alert the enemy and invite another blast. Arv donned the hydrophone headset.

“Can’t hear ‘em at all,” he reported later.

“Okay, let’s get to work on the damage,” Tom said. “But hold down the noise.”

The rest of the crew, with Hank in charge, set about repairing the steering. They soon traced and fixed the trouble—a ruptured hydraulic line in the servo-control system.

Tom, meanwhile, worked frantically on the radio. The set included an advanced underwater communications system which the Swifts had developed and which could be cut in by means of a toggle switch whenever the Sea Hound had to transmit without surfacing. Luckily the damage was not serious. Several circuits had opened under the terrific battering of the first torpedo explosion. In a short time Tom located and fixed the difficulties. By now, Hank and his men had the sea-copter ready for action again.

“Take her up, Hank,” Tom ordered, “I’ll try to contact the Rockwell.”

A special receiver-transmitter had been installed on the freighter to enable it to communicate with the Sea Hound. Tom was tense as he began calling the Rockwell. What had happened while they were lying doggo below? By this time Vaxilis’ submarine must be closing in for the kill. What if the bomb already had exploded I

“Rockwell to Sea Hound. We read you. Go ahead, please.”

Tom gasped with relief. He explained the situation rapidly. “Tell your captain to abandon ship at once. You probably have a little time left. The bomb may not have been set to explode for an hour or so after the sonar pulse began, to give the sub time to home in on you. But don’t bank on it! Repeat-abandon ship at once I We’ll get there fast and pick you up!”

“Message understood. Will carry out your orders,” the Navy operator replied calmly.

Tom’s own pulse was far from calm. Leaving the radio on, he took over the controls from Hank. Soon the Sea Hound broke water. Tom scanned the darkened ocean anxiously. They had been trailing the Rockwell at a distance of several miles, and the freighter had continued on course, unaware of the seacopter’s near encounter with the missile. By now the Rockwell was over the horizon-probably with Vaxilis’ submarine close on its tail. Neither was within sonar range of the Sea Hound.

“We’ll take to the air,” Tom told his crew. “Let’s hope we warned those Navy boys in time!”

Reversing blade pitch, he gunned the rotor turbine. The Sea Hound leaped aloft in a steep arc, then jettied in pursuit of the freighter.

“There she is!” Hank exclaimed presently.

Dead ahead, below them, the Rockwell was visible in the moonlight. Her wake had faded, indicating that she had heaved to. At such a distance it was hard to see exactly what was happening, but her lifeboats appeared to be already in the water. Tom swooped toward them.

Boom! A red ball of fire blossomed from the freighter’s starboard side. A cloud of hissing steam and smoke billowed up as the vessel listed heavily and started to capsize.

“Call the Sky Queen!” Tom exclaimed to Hank. The huge Flying Lab had been standing by at the Norfolk Naval Air Station in case of emergency.

Tom switched on all the lights, including the search beam, and brought the Sea Hound hovering down to the water. One of the lifeboats had swamped and foundered as a result of the geysering spray and turbulence from the blast. Tom dared not land too close for fear of injuring the men still struggling in the water.

The other boats picked them up, then rowed toward the seacopter. Her hatch was flung open and the Rockwell’s seamen scrambled aboard.

“Did everyone get off in time?” Tom inquired.

“Right, sir. We mustered all hands before the boats were lowered, and Captain Grimsby saw the last man off,” a bosun told him. “But some of the men will need medical attention.”

Several men had been injured by flying debris or in the confusion when the lifeboats capsized. Captain Grimsby, the last to climb aboard the Sea Hound, had suffered a bad cut over one eye.

“Sorry it turned out this way, sir,” Tom said.

Grimsby gave a wry smile. "We didn't expect any picnic when we volunteered for this job."

Hank Sterling took charge of giving first aid to the injured. Soon the Sky Queen arrived on the scene with Doc Simpson aboard and a Swift pilot, Slim Davis, at the controls. As the huge three-decker craft hovered close to the water, a sling was lowered, then a ladder, and the Rockwell's crew were taken off the Sea Hound.

"Navy subs are on the way, skipper," Slim reported to Tom.

"We may not be around when they get here, but I'll radio our course, which will be to follow the pirates I believe are hauling the freighter away,"

Tom replied. He was chafing with impatience, knowing the enemy submarine no doubt was already a good distance away with its "prize."

As soon as the Sky Queen took off, the Sea Hound submerged, and Tom switched on the aquatomic tracker. To his dismay, not a single light flashed on the readout panel!

"Those torpedo blasts must have knocked out our tracking gear, too!" he told Hank.

The seacopter surfaced again and the trouble was quickly traced to the RSG detectors mounted on the bow. Tom groaned as he examined them inside the cabin. The driftmeters in five of the units had been badly damaged, and the electronic circuitry in three of them would need extensive repair. Tom estimated that it would take several hours to rebuild the detectors.

Grimly he set to work. At last the RSG's were remounted and the Sea Hound plunged back below the surface to pick up the freighter's trail.

As Tom expected, the tracker showed that the Rockwell had sunk only a couple of hundred feet and then veered off horizontally. Plutonium traces betrayed the presence of the submarine which had taken her in tow. The course away from the scene of the sinking lay in a roughly southeasterly direction. Evidently the same method was to be used as with the Centurion, The hulk was being towed underwater to some place where its cargo could be looted.

"Where do you suppose they're heading?" Hank asked.

Tom frowned as he studied a chart. "Some guyot probably, if they've found one handy. Otherwise, I don't know-there's nothing else out there but the Bermuda Islands. They sure can't tow that job across the whole ocean!"

Tom gunned the Sea Hound to top speed. It was midmorning when the sonarscope indicated a land mass ahead. The seacopter surfaced briefly to scout with its periscope. Ahead lay a tiny island -apparently deserted-small in extent but high-ridged. Submerging again, Tom followed the trail in closer.

"We're getting pinged, skipper," reported Arv, who was manning the hydrophones. "They must have sonar buoys planted. The pulses are coming from more than one direction."

Tom was unworried by this, knowing that the Sea Hound's special sheathing made it undetectable by sonar. The seacopter continued its cautious approach to the little island.

Gradually the islet's formation became visible. It seemed to be crescent-shaped, enclosing a small inner

bay or lagoon. On the upward sloping bottom inside the harbor, Tom and his companions could make out a ship's hulk. The Rockwell! The enemy submarine was lying close alongside. Moving lights indicated skin divers at work.

"Let's hope they don't spot us and fire another torpedo!" a crewman muttered nervously.

"Don't worry. We'll play it safe and wait for the Navy to get here," Tom replied. "But first I want to get a look at that installation just outside the harbor entrance."

He was referring to a huge circular metal device planted on the sea floor. It appeared to have blades or vanes. Tom eased the Sea Hound closer for a better view.

Suddenly the device began to revolve. Alarmed, Tom hastily reversed the steering jets to back off. Too late! The blades were churning up a powerful current. Before Tom and his men could brace themselves, they were flung to one side of the cabin as the seacopter was sucked helplessly into the whirlpool!

## CHAPTER XX

### TRAPPED BELOW

DAZED and battered, the seacopter crew struggled to find a handhold and regain their feet. The whole ship resounded with the din of the maelstrom. Churning foam blinded the cabin window, but judging by the way the Sea Hound was gradually upending, it was obvious they were being drawn into the heart of the whirlpool.

Tom fought his way to the controls and shut off power to the rotor. Perhaps the resulting buoyancy, he thought hopefully, would be strong enough to bob the seacopter toward the surface. His hopes were soon dashed.

"We must be right in the vortex!" Tom gasped.

An instant later the cabin window cleared and light came flooding through the quartz glass pane. Tom now saw that a cavity had formed at the center of the whirlpool and that the seacopter's hull was partly out of water. They were rotating at dizzying speed. Tom paled as he saw the blur of steel and foam below.

What would happen when the Sea Hound was drawn into the whirling blades of Vaxilis' fiendish device? No doubt the device itself would be wrecked-but by then it would have served its purpose. The seacopter would be battered into shapeless junk, and her crew would die horribly!

The crewmen stared in helpless dismay.

"There's still one chance left!" Tom told them, shouting to make himself heard.

Clinging to the control wheel with one hand, he threw a lever, reversing blade pitch, then gunned the



throttle and hauled back on the wheel. The rotor hummed as it gathered power.

“If only there’s enough air in the cavity to give us lift!” Tom thought fervently. Even a partial vacuum might prevent the rotor blades from taking a sufficient bite.

For a few seconds nothing happened. Then, slowly but surely, the rotor lifted the seacopter out of the whirlpool. A moment later they were soaring free!

Below lay the island, its green-clad slopes curving around the enclosed lagoon. Near the beach stood a rambling house. Two men were outside-Vaxilis’ henchmen, no doubt.

Tom could see them gaping up at the Sea Hound in open-mouthed astonishment. A moment later they sprinted toward a clump of red-flowering brush.

Both men went sprawling on their faces as the seacopter swooped in low. Tom grinned and sped off seaward, then circled back-this time on the far side of the island, so that the Sea Hound would be hidden from view behind the ridge. Here he brought the seacopter hovering down to the water and issued quick orders to his crew.

A short time later Tom and Arv emerged through the hatch in hydrolung suits and dived over the side. Hugging the shore, they jetted around the island toward the harbor, careful not to get too close to the whirlpool.

When they were as near the lagoon as Tom thought safe, they scrambled cautiously ashore. Meanwhile, the Sea Hound had soared aloft and was buzzing the island. A clatter of ack-ack filled the air, but the jet-propelled seacopter, with Hank Sterling’s expert hand at the controls, was dodging the shell bursts easily.

“Those guys we saw must have been running for the gun emplacement,” Arv murmured.

Tom nodded his head. “It’s probably camouflaged under the brush. Let’s hope Hank keeps ‘em too busy to spot us!”

The ridge sloped downward at each end of the island, leaving only a gentle rise of ground between the outer shoreline and the inner harbor. Tom and Arv scaled the rise, then darted down toward the house, keeping under cover in the lush greenery that coated the slopes.

On the side of the house away from the gunfire, they paused to peer in a window. Two people were inside, tied to chairs. Tom’s heart leaped as he recognized one of the captives.

“It’s Bud!” he whispered to Arv.

“Who’s the other guy?” Arv wondered aloud. The second prisoner’s back was to the window. He was black-haired and appeared to be tall and thin.

“I think I can guess, but we’ll soon find out,” Tom replied. Apparently the two men firing at the seacopter had been guarding the captives, since no one else was visible inside.

Tom and Arv waited until another pass by the Sea Hound turned the gunners’ heads away from the cabin. Then they darted around to the front and slipped inside. Bud let out a yelp of joy.

“Tom! Arv! Where’d you guys come from? Don’t tell me you swam here!”

“That’s the Sea Hound they’re shooting at, boy!” Tom replied with a grin.

As Tom had guessed, the other prisoner was Tristan Carlow. He looked dazed with relief and stammered out his thanks as Tom and Arv untied them. Bud quickly filled Tom in on what had happened aboard the Naiad. A helicopter had removed all hands from the yacht and taken them to a rendezvous point ashore before daybreak.

“Vaxilis decided it would be smart, for the sake of his own life and underhanded schemes, to hold me as a hostage,” Bud explained.

From their shore rendezvous, they had been picked up by a small trading vessel owned by Vaxilis and taken to a spot on the North African coast where the tycoon maintained a luxurious hideaway known only to his closest henchmen.

“That guy doesn’t trust anyone,” Bud added with a chuckle. “When he came here to pull his latest job, he brought the loot along with him. From the way this place is rigged, I think he planned it as a permanent sub base. The guards told us the island was uninhabited and Vaxilis had leased it under a phony name.”

Carlow related that he had been kidnapped in Paris by men who had offered to buy his invention and flown him to the island in a seaplane. Actually they wanted to prevent him from clearing himself or revealing what he had discovered about Vaxilis’ true character.

Tom made no comment. Instead, he hastily inspected the house. Although it was purposely plain and unimposing from the outside, it was comfortably furnished and well stocked with provisions. The Delian Apollo and the stolen paintings were stored in a bedroom with drawn draperies over them. The gold bullion, also covered, had been stacked along one wall.

Noticing a powerful radio set and a phone, Tom asked, “What’s the phone for?”

“It communicates with the sub in the harbor, Bud replied. “And that switch on the wall controls the whirlpool machine.”

“Then the Sea Hound didn’t trigger off the whirlpool automatically?” Arv put in.

Bud shook his head. “It can be triggered by a sonar buoy alarm system, from what the guards said, but that’s not what happened this time. You must have been spotted by a lookout on the sub, because the guards got a call over the phone and then switched it on from up here.”

“Hmm. And the machine is still turned on,” Tom remarked thoughtfully.

Presently the gunfire died away as the Sea Hound flew off and submerged, in accordance with Tom’s orders, to await the hydronauts’ return.

“Those two guards will be coming back, skipper,” Arv said. “We’d better get set for them!”

Tom issued quick orders. “Bud, you and Carlow get back on your chairs. We’ll fix the ropes to look as if you’re still tied-just in case the guards glance through the window before they come in. Arv and I will stand behind the door.”

A few minutes later the door opened and the two guards walked in unsuspectingly. Tom and Arv pounced on them. Bud and Carlow promptly threw off their ropes and joined the fray. In a second the guards were overpowered and disarmed.

Tom recognized one of them immediately. "He's the guy who posed as that reporter, Venuto Giraud, and later arranged to have me kidnapped in London," Tom said to his friends.

Bud chuckled at the furious Giraud. "Tables turned, eh?"

Just as they finished tying the prisoners' hands to the chairs, the telephone rang. "You answer it," Tom said to the fake reporter.

The man started to refuse sullenly. But his expression changed as Bud applied a painful grip to his arm. "You heard what my friend said, pal-get moving!"

The man, his hands still tied, was released from the chair and marched to the telephone under Bud's persuasive grip. Tom lifted the phone from its cradle and held it up to the prisoner.

"Krajenko here."

Vaxilis' voice replied curtly, "What has happened up there? I can hear no more gunfire over our listening equipment at the surface."

"We-uh-drove the seacopter off, sir," Krajenko said as Bud tightened his grip warningly.

"Fools! You should have shot it down!" Vaxilis snarled. "Start removing everything from the cabin and turn off the whirlpool. We must clear out of here before Swift returns with help!"

Tom suddenly took the phone. In a cold voice he said, "Swift is here right now, Mr. Vaxilis-and the whirlpool will remain turned on. You and the evidence of your latest crime are going to stay trapped inside the harbor until the authorities get here!"

Bud and Arv hooted with glee.

Tom immediately radioed a full report of the situation to Admiral Hopkins in Norfolk. First to land on the water at the scene were carrier-based sub chaser planes from a Hunter-Killer Task Force. These were followed by helicopters armed with depth bombs and a helicopter transport loaded with Marines. Meanwhile, Navy submarines, which had been following Tom's radioed course from the scene of the sinking, patrolled outside the harbor to watch for any desperate attempt by Vaxilis' submarine to get through the whirlpool.

Realizing the situation was hopeless, Vaxilis surfaced and surrendered. His henchmen now talked freely.

Krajenko confessed that he had sabotaged Tom's and Bud's hydrolung gear to prevent any danger that they might discover the looting of the Centurion en route. The radiophoto of the drowning Roman was a code message ordering him to do it. It had been transmitted by Vaxilis' men from Europe after they had planted a bomb in the liner's engine room and had been picked up by Krajenko on a portable receiver.

The electronic fishing vessel belonged to Vaxilis. After it radioed word that the hydronauts had stumbled onto their operation, Krajenko had arranged Tom's kidnapping in London to keep him from returning to the guyot to investigate.

The shark man and his helper were Vaxilis employees. They had been hired to get rid of the young inventor after it was learned that Tom would undertake to salvage the Centurion.

The Arab's story in Paris was a move to throw suspicion on Carlow after the undersea lamp had been traced to Vaxilis. Many of the magnate's henchmen were rounded up, including the chauffeur and the two strong-arm men, and the saboteur who planted the first bomb aboard the Rockwell. Krajenko revealed that the rest of Vaxilis' criminal group could be found at his North African base.

After the prisoners had been taken away on the Navy vessels, Tom and his companions started back to Fearing Island in the Sea Hound.

Hank noticed Tom yawn and stretch wearily. "Better let me take the controls, skipper."

"Okay. Thanks."

The young inventor did not fall asleep, however. He began to wonder what his next invention would be and the adventures it might bring. Tom could not foresee that he would soon be probing the mystery of a weird object from outer space with his 3-D Telejector.

A few moments later Bud answered the radio. "Wow! It's Admiral Hopkins, Tom," he said. "They want us to go to Norfolk first for a big reception and press conference. Sounds as if you have a date with a Navy medal!"

Tom grinned. "Guess that's one date I won't forget!"

THE END

TOM SWIFT AND HIS AQUATOMIC TRACKER

BY VICTOR APPLETON II

No. 23 in the Tom Swift Jr. series.