

The Three Investigators

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The Adventure of the Bronze Claw



Mark Zahn

The Three Investigators in

The Adventure of the
Bronze
Claw

by Mark Zahn

Based on characters created by Robert Arthur

Illustrations by Mark Zahn

Presented by: www.threeinvestigatorsbooks.com

Dedicated to Robert Arthur (1909-1969)

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Contents

An introduction – and warning – from John Crowe	4
1. Oregon Trail	6
2. Welcome To Anchor Bay!	12
3. The Legend of Blackbeard	19
4. On The Case!	28
5. The New Pirates	32
6. The Man In Black	41
7. The Bronze Claw	46
8. The Dutch Flute	55
9. The Plot Thickens	62
10. Jupe And Pete On The Trail	66
11. Live And Let Live	75
12. Calling Rocky Beach!	80
13. Blackbeard's Ghost	86
14. Bob's In Trouble!	92
15. No Tricks – Or Else!	96
16. Man In Black - Unmasked	102
17. But Where's Bob?	110
18. John Crowe Speaking	119

AN INTRODUCTION – AND WARNING – FROM JOHN CROWE

READERS OF MYSTERY BEWARE! If you are faint of heart when faced with incredible danger, nefarious criminals, or marauding pirates from beyond the grave, I suggest you not turn another page!

In fact, those who tremble when they hear a board creak in an empty house may want to find a different story to read altogether! Either way, I would think twice before reading this book at night...

At this point you may be asking yourself just who is John Crowe, and why is he introducing an adventure of The Three Investigators? Well, I suppose an explanation is needed. I am a writer of mystery novels by trade, and I first met Jupe, Pete, and Bob several months ago when an exciting case of their's called *The Secret of Shark Reef* brought them to my home of Santa Barbara, California – a city that is due south of their own hometown of Rocky Beach.

Needless to say, the boys solved the mystery and eventually returned home, but I'm proud to say that we have kept in touch and become fast friends over the last several months. I've even sent each of them a signed copy of my latest mystery novel: *“Death In The Shadows.”*

Now! With that said, let us get on with it, shall we?

To start things off, let's talk about the First Investigator of the firm, Jupiter Jones. Jupe, as his friends call him, is the self-proclaimed leader of the trio, and rightly so! His immense mental capacity, which many adults find unsettling, and knack for solving mysteries, (that have baffled those same adults), make this slightly over-weight crimefighter a dangerous foe to any criminal

who is unfortunate enough to cross his path!

Pete Crenshaw is the lanky and muscular Second Investigator. Pete is a star of many sports – he even wrestles for the high school team. It is this natural athletic agility that allows him to leap fences and scale rooftops when a case demands it. It must be said that Pete is extremely cautious by nature, and often needs to be convinced before undertaking one of Jupiter’s schemes at dangerous deduction. That’s not to say he’s cowardly... just, well, cautious.

Finally, we have Bob Andrews – otherwise known as “Records.” Bob is in charge of all the research and record keeping that is necessary when operating a real-life detective firm, and he excels at his job! Don’t get me wrong; he may look studious, but Bob is just as brave as his partners! Bob has a real talent for uncovering vital information when a case has hit a dead end.

As I said before, the boys reside in the coastal town of Rocky Beach, California, not far from Hollywood. They make their headquarters in a thirty-foot mobile home trailer which they have buried in junk inside The Jones Salvage Yard. The salvage yard is widely known on the Pacific coast for having almost everything imaginable in its inventory. It’s run by Jupe’s aunt and uncle,

Titus and Mathilda Jones, who Jupe has lived with since he was orphaned as a very small child, and who also happen to play a part in the mystery you are about to read.

I think I have said enough to get you started, but remember my warning! This bizarre adventure may have you sleeping with your bedroom light on for many nights to come! Still interested?

Don’t say I didn’t warn you . . .

JOHN CROWE

1

Oregon Trail

“WATCH OUT!” cried Jupiter Jones.

It was too late for Pete Crenshaw. Loaded down with an old fashioned steamer trunk, a pair of ancient oars, and various other items of nautical salvage, the tall boy didn't see he was walking right into a tower of bedsprings that Jupiter had neatly stacked that morning near the front gates of the Jones Salvage Yard.

Pete stopped in his tracks when he heard Jupiter's warning, but it was too late. The pile of bedsprings came crashing down, forcing Bob Andrews to leap out of the way before he was buried beneath them!

Right on cue, Jupiter's Aunt Mathilda came bustling out of the small cabin that served as the salvage yard's office.

“Mercy and goodness and sweetness and light!” she bellowed. “What's all the racket?” When she saw Bob getting up off the ground and dusting himself off, concern washed over her face. “Are you all right, Robert? Are you hurt?”

“I'm fine,” said the smallest of the three boys, “but the bedsprings need some help.”

Aunt Mathilda looked at the old fashioned pocket-watch she kept in her apron and frowned. “Never mind the bedsprings,” she said, “we've got to get that truck loaded before Titus and Hans and Konrad get back from their buying trip in Burbank!” The goodnatured woman, who actually ran the salvage yard, turned on her heel and marched back to the office. When she reached the door, she stopped and hollered over her shoulder.

“And you be more careful, Pete Crenshaw!”

Pete looked at her guiltily. “Yes ma'am,” he said. “I guess I

shouldn't have tried to carry all that junk in one trip.”

Mathilda Jones liked to look stern on the outside, but on the inside everyone knew she had a heart of gold. She smiled at Pete. “No harm done,” she chuckled. “I just wouldn't want to explain to Bob's parents how he ended up in the hospital with a bedspring stuck on his head!”

Still smiling, she disappeared inside the office to finish her paperwork. When she had gone, Pete turned to Jupiter.

“What does your Uncle Titus want with all this nautical equipment anyway? I thought we were all going to Oregon for a vacation.”

A week before, Jupiter's aunt and uncle had announced the unthinkable – they were taking two weeks off for a vacation. To Jupiter, this was unheard of.

The last time Titus and Mathilda Jones tried to go on vacation was several years ago. It was supposed to be a two week trip to Monterey, but less than a week had passed before they had filled up the back of the truck with salvage, including several wooden horses from a demolished carousel, a six foot plaster statue of Michelangelo's “David,” and a rolltop desk that Uncle Titus claimed was used by a famous author, although he couldn't recall which one. With all that priceless treasure just sitting in the back of the truck waiting to be stolen, the Jones' simply had to pack up early and head home – where they were really happiest anyway.

Now, they had unexpectedly announced they would be taking a real vacation this time. Hans and Konrad, the two blond brothers from Bavaria who helped out at the yard, were being left in charge during their absence.

When Jupiter had learned his aunt and uncle were going to Oregon to visit Titus's younger brother, Atticus, he immediately asked if Pete and Bob could come along as well.

“I don’t see why not,” Uncle Titus had said, puffing heartily on his pipe. “Two weeks with Atticus Cornelius Jones will be a real education for you boys,” he said with a mischievous gleam in his eye, “although what you learn may be knowledge best left out of schoolbooks!”

Jupiter had only met his Uncle Atticus once before, when he was very young – shortly after his parents had died. From what he could recall, and the stories his Uncle Titus had told him, Atticus Jones was also in the salvage trade, but of a different sort. Titus Jones liked to describe his younger brother as an “underwater archeologist,” meaning he found his salvage beneath the waves in the many coves and inlets that dotted the coastline near his home of Anchor Bay, Oregon.

Atticus was also considered one of the leading authorities on pirate lore, and Jupiter could still remember many of the gruesome characters that peppered the stories his uncle told him so many years before – stories that Aunt Mathilda would rather Jupiter had not heard! Mathilda did not necessarily disapprove of Titus’s younger brother, but she couldn’t help thinking he should settle down and marry a nice woman, instead of living as a brash, seafaring adventurer.

Jupiter, lost in thought as he loaded the battered steamer trunk into the back of the salvage yard’s larger truck, didn’t hear Pete’s question.

“Jupe, I said what does your uncle want with all this junk?”

Jupiter snapped out of his daydream. “Oh, it’s for Uncle Atticus. I guess he’s started up a new business, a small shop to sell all the neat navigational instruments and other pirate artifacts that he’s found on his dives.”

“Has he found any buried treasure?” asked Bob excitedly, “any gold or jewels?”

“Not that I know of, Records,” said the chubby First Investigator. “Just a dubloons, some few flecks of gold dust, but nothing that would constitute a real pirate’s treasure. Although,” he added, “Uncle Titus says his brother claims to have recently made a discovery that may be of incredible historical importance.”

“Gosh, I wonder what it could be.” Pete said out loud as he helped Jupiter and Bob load the rest of the salvage onto the truck. Jupiter shook his head. “He wouldn’t say. He just told Uncle Titus that he has to come up and see it in person.”

“Maybe he really did find pirate’s treasure after all!” Bob crowed. “Maybe he’s rich!”

The boys were still talking excitedly about this possibility when Titus Jones drove the smaller truck through the huge iron gates. He hopped out and smiled broadly at the boys.

“All packed and ready to go?” he boomed. “Didn’t forget to pack your toothbrush, did you young Peter?”

“No sir,” said Pete, “we’ve got everything we need.”

“Stupendous!” cried Uncle Titus. He curled his enormous mustache around his finger and looked sideways at Jupiter. “Has your aunt finished up with the books, or has she been dillydallying, my boy?”

Jupiter was about to reply when he was cut off by a grunt coming from the office doorway.

“Dillydallying, my foot!” his Aunt Mathilda frowned. “I’ve spent all morning correcting your mistakes in the books, Titus Andronicus Jones!”

Uncle Titus winked at Jupiter, then swept Aunt Mathilda off her feet - planting a large kiss on her cheek. The boys burst out in fits of laughter as she turned three shades of red - ranting and raving at her husband to put her down.

Still laughing, the boys climbed into the back of the big truck



and closed the gate. When Titus had given final instructions to Hans and Konrad, then double checked to make sure they had loaded all the salvage his brother had requested, he leaped into the cab of the truck and fired up the engine.

“Take good care of the yard!” he called out to Hans and Konrad. “Don’t forget to lock up at night. And mind the cash box. And see that you get the mail from the house.”

“Yah,” said Hans, nodding his blond head with vigor at each instruction, “no worry, Mr. Jones. Konrad and I, we take care of everything.”

Konrad grinned at Uncle Titus. “Try to stay away the whole two weeks this time, hokay?”

“There’s ham and a fresh apple pie in the refrigerator and plenty of canned foods in the pantry,” Aunt Mathilda instructed.

Uncle Titus chuckled and put the truck in gear. “We’ll see you in two weeks!” he cried.

As the truck pulled out of the salvage yard, The Three Investigators waved goodbye to Hans and Konrad. In the front of the truck, Uncle Titus was belting out an off-key version of “Asleep In The Deep,” his favorite song. Everyone was in high spirits. It promised to be an interesting trip.

The boys had no idea how interesting it would be!

2

Welcome To Anchor Bay!

TITUS JONES had driven straight through the night, claiming he was too excited to see his brother to bother with such things as sleep. It was dawn when the big truck made its way up the foggy coast highway. The lights of the little fishing village of Anchor Bay glittered like jewels in the gray morning sky.

The boys had drawn straws so one of them could sleep inside the cozy warmth of the truck's cab. Pete was the winner, and Jupiter and Bob had grumbled at their bad luck at first. But the boys soon gave in to their adventurous spirit and decided they would much rather be snuggled up in their sleeping bags under the tarp covering Atticus Jones's salvage, than cramped between Jupe's aunt and uncle – particularly with Aunt Mathilda's penchant for snoring, which Jupe maintained could wake the dead!

Jupiter roused himself when he felt the truck slowing as it entered the city limits of Anchor Bay. He yawned and stretched like an oversized cat, then shook Bob awake. The smaller, studious boy moaned inside his sleeping bag.

“Go away... if you had any compassion you'd let me sleep for another week!”

Jupiter grinned and undid a few bindings on his side of the tarp. He threw a corner of the flap open, slid open the side window of the truck's topper, and stuck his head up into the chilly morning breeze. Bob finally relented and poked his head out of his sleeping bag like a cranky tortoise.

“It's light out, but my brain says I should still be sleeping,” he complained.

“We're now officially in Oregon,” Jupiter reported. “Let's

hope Uncle Atticus has a king-sized breakfast waiting for us. I'm famished!"

Bob grinned. "As Pete would say: I'll buy a double helping of that!"

The two boys watched as the rustic sea-port unfolded behind them. To their left, shrouded in the early morning fog, were weather-beaten storefronts with signs advertising bait and tackle situated next to dilapidated sandwich shops selling food and cold drinks. To their right were long docks leading out into the ocean where trawlers were being loaded up by fishermen in yellow rain-coats, preparing for a long day out on the water checking traps for lobsters, and further out, hunting for salmon and tuna.

Jupe thought the town had an eerie silence, as no one but the fishermen were up at this hour. He watched in fascination as the men in slickers, stocking caps, and rubber boots untied their moorings and shoved off into the misty bay.

In the front of the cab, Uncle Titus was fiddling with a map, trying to locate the sidestreet that lead to his brother's house. After making little progress trying to manage the steering wheel and follow the map, he finally roused Pete and assigned map duty to him. Together they found the correct street in no time. Pete always seemed to know where he was going, even if he had never been in a particular town before.

Eventually the salvage yard truck turned left and jounced down a steep, narrow drive of gravel in the direction of the ocean. It looked to Jupiter as if his Uncle Atticus's home was right on the water. Jupe was pleased to see that his observation was partly true. Atticus Jones's home was a small, bungalow style house typical of the fishermen who populated the area. Those hearty men preferred sparse, practical domiciles over anything fancy with unnecessary adornments. The combination of harsh weather and

salt from the seawater demanded the construction of sturdy, rugged homes. Atticus Jones's house was well-maintained and in good repair, although Jupe had a feeling his Aunt Mathilda would have the boys slapping on a fresh coat of paint before the end of their trip.

Next to his house was a large blue boat with white trim that looked big enough to live in. It was docked ten feet down a seawall, and could be reached by a rickety flight of wooden stairs leading out onto a short dock. Painted in neat letters on the back of the boat was the name: "QUEEN ANNE'S REVENGE." Jupiter deduced it was the boat his uncle used for diving, and, most likely, for living as well.

Uncle Titus pulled up to the front door and killed the engine. He had parked the truck next to a battered old station wagon. The rusty red late-model was presumably Atticus Jones's vehicle.

Aunt Mathilda climbed slowly out of the truck, moving stiffly from her aching joints. Titus, on the other hand, came bounding out of the cab, calling his brother's name.

"Atticus Jones! Where are you, you old scalawag? Show yourself, you pirate, or I'll be forced to raise my jolly roger and invade your home, stealing a booty of bacon and eggs!"

Jupiter stood on the gravel drive with his hands on his hips and listened – his head cocked to one side. There was no reply from within the home, and Uncle Titus's booming voice served only to unsettle a group of crows perched on Atticus's rooftop. They cawed at the group reproachfully and flew away with a rustle of feathers.

"Saints and sinners!" hissed Aunt Mathilda. "You'll awake the entire neighborhood, Titus Jones!"

"Anyone living this close to the water most likely gets up with the sun, my dear!" Jupe's uncle cried. "Any fisherman still sleep-

ing this late may as well stay in bed, for he's surely been beaten to all the prime spots!"

"Maybe he's out back," suggested Bob.

"I guess he must be," said Uncle Titus, shrugging his shoulders.

"If he were a normal human being he'd still be in bed," grumbled Pete.

"Atticus has gotten up at the crack of dawn since we were boys," Titus replied. "He's certainly not normal, but I wonder if he has forgotten that we were coming today."

Aunt Mathilda had been waiting patiently for as long as she could bear. With a 'hrumph!', and a 'typical!', she stalked toward the back of the house in search of their host.

"Maybe we should..." Bob was about to suggest carrying their luggage inside when he caught a glimpse of Jupiter's face. The chubby boy was pinching his bottom lip – a signal Bob and Pete always recognized – Jupe was pondering something fiercely. It was a habit the First Investigator had whenever he was lost in thought. Most of the time he didn't even know he was doing it.

"What's wrong, Bob?" asked Pete as he touched his toes, trying to stretch out his legs and limber up his aching knees, which had banged against the dashboard all night.

"I think Jupe is on to something. What do you see, First?"

Jupiter approached the front door of the small bungalow, holding a finger to his lips. He turned and whispered to Pete.

"Second, go around back and get Aunt Mathilda. And keep her quiet!"

Pete didn't hesitate – he trusted Jupe's instincts. The tall boy dashed around the side of the house, running on the balls of his feet so as to make the least amount of noise possible.

"What's wrong, Jupiter?" asked Uncle Titus. Worry crept into

his voice.

“The front door is ajar,” Jupe informed them. “We better proceed with caution until we find out what’s going on and what happened to Uncle Atticus.”

“Do you think he’s in trouble?” asked Bob.

“Best not to speculate until we investigate further,” Jupiter instructed. When Pete had brought a wide-eyed Aunt Mathilda back around to the front of the house, Jupe gave orders to Bob, Pete, and Uncle Titus.

“Records, stay here with Aunt Mathilda. Uncle Titus and Second will move on either side toward the rear of the house and the Queen Anne’s Revenge while I go in the front door.”

“What do we do if we see someone?” asked Pete nervously.

Jupiter mulled this over for a moment, trying to think of a good alert. He shrugged his shoulders. “Caw like a crow, I guess.”

“Be careful boys,” warned Aunt Mathilda, “there could be a burglar. If you surprise him he might do something desperate.”

“Gee, I hadn’t thought of that,” winced Pete as he snuck down the side of the house.

Once inside his uncle’s home, Jupiter squinted his eyes and let them adjust to the dim interior. As he tip-toed further within the silent bungalow, he could make out hulking shapes crowded in the shadows, and looming piles of nautical salvage and diving equipment. In the background was the constant, hypnotic lull of the ocean.

Suddenly, from within the gloom, there came the sound of a door being gently closed. Jupe paused for a moment in the middle of the house and surveyed his surroundings. The stocky boy held his breath and waited for another sound. His eyes ran over the piles of salvage recovered from the sea. It seemed Uncle Atticus had almost as much junk as Uncle Titus – only it was

inside his house!

There were ancient sailing maps preserved inside hand carved oak frames. There were corroded anchors from long sunken ships sitting next to piles of cannonballs. There was even an old fashioned, full-body, deep-sea diving rig with a copper helmet and round portals, similar to a helmet they had brought from Rocky each.

Jupe approached the old suit, which hung from thick chains, and stood in front of it. It would have taken a very large, very strong man to be able to operate that suit, he surmised. He had helped Pete lift the helmet they brought into the back of the truck, and that had weighed almost fifty pounds, without the one-inch thick glass portals! The rest of the suit was made of thick white canvas with a lead belt and massive lead-toed boots. It looked to Jupiter like a space-suit he had seen aliens wear in a science-fiction movie once.

He admired the old diving suit for another moment, then turned his back, intent on continuing his search for the intruder. But without warning, the ancient diving suit suddenly came alive!

With a rattle of chains, its massive arms and thick gloves shot out and grabbed Jupiter, pinning his arms to his sides! The normally cool First Investigator could only let out a startled yelp before a thick gloved hand covered his mouth!

He was being held in a fierce, smothering grip, and no matter how hard he struggled, he couldn't get free!



3

The Legend of Blackbeard

JUPITER'S FIRST reaction to the diving suit's embrace was panic, but his mind quickly began working in its precise, methodical way. He remembered a wrestling move Pete had shown him once, and without hesitation he pried his right arm under his assailant's grasp and shot it over his head, effectively breaking free from the deadly clutches of his attacker.

From somewhere inside the diving suit, a disembodied voice was growling. "I've got you now, you bloody thief! I've finally caught you with your hand in the cookie jar!"

Once out of the grasp of the diving man, Jupiter began cawing like a crow at the top of his lungs. When he did so, a familiar looking face appeared at the side of the suit and frowned.

"Say, what kind of thief are you?"

Jupiter stopped in mid-caw and blinked. "Uncle Atticus?"

"Jupiter?"

At that moment the rest of the group came barreling into the dimly lit room. Atticus Jones switched on the lights and smiled. The boys were amazed to see a face that was uncannily familiar.

Except for being a couple of inches shorter, and having an even larger mustache, Atticus Jones could have passed for Titus Jones's twin brother.

"Titus Andronicus! Why, you old milksop – I wasn't expecting you until this evening! And you brought the prettiest lady in all of Southern California along for the ride."

Aunt Mathilda rolled her eyes and shook a finger at Atticus. "You haven't changed a bit, Atticus Jones! Scaring the daylights out of all of us with your tricks. And don't you try to sweet talk

me. Save it for a lady who isn't married – maybe she can help you straighten up this place. I see I have my work cut out for me as it is!”

Atticus Jones kissed Aunt Mathilda on the hand and chuckled. “You'll do no such thing, my good lady. Everything here is carefully organized and catalogued. I have my own special system, and if you go straightening it up, you'll ruin everything. I forbid it!”

Now he turned to the boys, his walrus mustache dancing as he smiled. “Jupiter, it has been too long. You know you've always been my favorite nephew. Now then, who are your mates?”

Jupe did not hesitate. Reaching into his shirt pocket he withdrew one of The Three Investigator's oversized business cards and a second card and handed them to his uncle. “Perhaps these will explain,” he said. The first card read:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

“We Investigate Anything”

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First Investigator.....Jupiter Jones
 Second Investigator.....Peter Crenshaw
 Records & Research.....Bob Andrews

The second card read:

*This certifies that the bearer is a Volunteer
 Junior Assistant Deputy cooperating with the
 police force of Rocky Beach. Any assistance
 given him will be appreciated.*

*(Signed) Samuel Reynolds
 Chief of Police*

Never being one to pass up a possible mystery, Jupiter pressed on quickly. “I couldn’t help noticing what you said while you were inside the diving suit, Uncle Atticus. You seemed to think I was a criminal. If you have been burglarized recently, perhaps The Three Investigators could be of service to you.”

Atticus Jones chortled and ran a finger down the side of his big nose in a secretive way, pointing it at Jupe and winking. “My brother has always said you’re as sharp as a tack. I just might have something for your investigative enterprise.”

But before he could go on, there was a loud knock on the front door. Atticus Jones strode out the front hall, his visitors following close behind.

A tall, handsome young man of about thirty, with blond hair and crystal blue eyes stood panting on the front step. He wiped sweat from his brow and tried to catch his breath.

“Any luck, Cutter?” asked Atticus grimly.

The man named Cutter shook his head, taking no notice of the large group that had assembled in the hallway.

“I’m afraid not. I thought I saw him heading in the direction of downtown, he was dressed all in black. He could be anywhere. Most likely hiding in one of the boats that are still docked. We’ll never find him now.”

“Thunderaton!” howled Atticus. “That no good blackguard has stolen his last treasure – mark my words!”

Jupiter’s eyes gleamed. “So your home *has* been broken into! And not for the first time!”

Aunt Mathilda stood with her arms crossed. She gave Jupiter a stern look. “Don’t go sticking your nose into other people’s business, Jupiter Jones. Your puzzle-solving club will just have to wait until we get back to Rocky Beach. This is a matter for the police.”

The man named Cutter looked at Jupiter, and then at Atticus in confusion. “Puzzle-solving club? Who are these people, Jones?”

Uncle Atticus put his arm around Jupe’s shoulders and grinned. “Where are my manners? Captain Oscar Cutter, this is my nephew Jupiter Jones, his friends Robert and Peter, and my older brother Titus and his lovely wife Mathilda. They’ve come all the way from Rocky Beach, California to pay me a little visit.”

Captain Cutter politely shook hands with everyone. “It’s a real pleasure to meet you folks. I hope you enjoy your stay in Anchor Bay. You have my word you won’t find a better tasting salmon dinner on the West Coast!”

At the mention of food, Jupe’s stomach rumbled boisterously and the whole group burst out laughing.

Pete clapped Jupiter on the back. “Now there’s a real mystery. How has Jupe gone so long without something to eat!”

Titus Jones stood by his brother and lit his pipe, puffing thoughtfully for a moment. “Well, I suppose we ought to call the police and then see what we can do about rounding up some breakfast. These boys haven’t eaten since dinner last night.”

The younger Jones shook his head. “There’s no point in calling the police. I’ve called them every other week for the last two months. They come and sniff around and say the same thing everytime. There’s nothing they can do. They suggest I get a security system or install better locks on my doors. But what’s the point? To most people, everything I have is useless junk! Only the most avid collector of sea artifacts would know the true value of my finds.”

Jupiter signaled to Bob to take out his small notebook and pencil. Once Jupiter Jones was on the scent of a case, there was no stopping him until it was solved – no matter what Aunt

Mathilda said.

“Did the thief in black clothes take anything of value this morning, Uncle Atticus?” Atticus Jones looked startled. “I - I don’t know. Up until now the thief has only taken minor things: a few cannonballs, some old wine bottles, a blunderbuss or two.”

“A blunder-what...?” asked Pete.

“A blunderbuss,” Oscar Cutter explained. “It’s an old fashioned pistol that was used by the pirates and military long ago. They’re quite common on the sea-bed around here.”

Now Bob spoke up. “Uncle Titus had mentioned that you had found a real treasure recently, Mr. Jones. Something big that would be of historical interest. Could that be what the thief is looking for?”

“You’ve found something big?” asked Cutter, his voice sounding somewhat chagrined that he hadn’t been made privy to Atticus Jones’s most recent find. “When was this? You hadn’t told me...”

But Atticus wasn’t listening. His face had gone ashen.

“Good night! I hadn’t thought of that. I better go see if it’s still there!”

The younger Jones brother raced through the house with everyone close at his heels. He stopped next to the diving suit in which he had grabbed Jupiter – Jupe could now see the suit was really just a display with a step stool leading to the opened back side.

Atticus undid two brass latches and threw open a battered steamer trunk. He let out a choked cry.

“Gone! Merciful goodness... it’s gone!”

Jupiter, Pete, and Bob crowded around Atticus and peered inside the old trunk. It looked like any of a hundred that had come through the salvage yard over the years. Certainly not sturdy

enough to keep a treasure in, thought Jupiter. A child could have easily taken whatever was inside. It hadn't even been locked!

Titus was practically dancing from foot to foot. "What is it my boy? What's been taken? Speak up before I die of curiosity!"

Atticus Jones sighed and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "My most recent find..." he sighed lamely. "If it turned out to be what I suspected, it would have changed all that we now know of William Teach's legacy!"

"William Teach?" said Jupiter excitedly. "You mean Blackbeard the pirate?"

"One and the same," murmured Atticus.

"You think you've found something of Blackbeard's?" Cutter gasped in astonishment. The researcher looked as if he might faint, and he had to steady himself against an oaken beam.

"Possibly... Possibly," said Atticus Jones, shaking his head. "I had been salvaging a shipwreck off the Ocracoke Peninsula – they're practically a dime a dozen if you know where to look. When I happened upon a discovery of incredible magnitude!"

Atticus looked at the boys. "Do you know any of the history of William Teach?"

"Jupe knows a lot!" Pete boasted. "We've solved several cases involving pirates, although those mysteries involved West Coast pirates, such as the legend of the Purple Pirate."

Jupiter, having an amazing memory and a gift for instant recall of almost anything he read, took a deep breath. "William Teach, better known as Blackbeard the pirate, began his seafaring career in the late 1600's as a privateer in what is now known as North Carolina. Privateering was a legitimate profession and was even endorsed by the government back then. Actually, Blackbeard's career as a pirate was fairly short-lived. Around 1716 he had amassed a fleet of four ships: his flagship, the *Queen*

Anne's Revenge; two smaller sloops called the *Adventure* and the *Revenge*; and a fourth, even smaller ship, which was used as a tender ship to serve the other three.”

Atticus Jones marveled at his nephew's knowledge of pirates, but Jupiter was just getting started. “By 1718, Blackbeard and his crew of almost three hundred men were so feared around the East Coast that vessels actually sailed wide of North Carolina, miles out of their way, in order to avoid being plundered.

“Governor Spotswood of Virginia, having decided that the governor of North Carolina was doing nothing to apprehend the pirate, set out to do just that. He dispatched two vessels under the command of Lt. Robert Maynard to a channel called Teach's Hole. What followed next was a bloody battle which saw the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and the *Adventure* run aground and sunk.

“Blackbeard was said to have suffered over thirty injuries in the battle, including gunshot and knife wounds. It is said that he aimed his last bullet at Lt. Maynard's head, and then fell dead on the bloody deck of Maynard's ship before he could pull the trigger. Lt. Maynard cut off Blackbeard's head as proof of the pirate's death, and hung it from the bowsprit of his ship. He then threw the body overboard. His men claimed that Blackbeard's body was still so evil that it swam around the navy vessel three times before sinking into the depths.”

Aunt Mathilda shook herself as if to remove the grisly image of Blackbeard's demise. “What an awful story! I can't imagine why you would want to fill your head with such rubbish, Jupiter.”

“So now we all know the background of Blackbeard,” said Oscar Cutter impatiently, “what's it got to do with your discovery?”

Atticus Jones gazed absently into the empty trunk and sighed again. “You heard how the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and the

Adventure were sunk in the battle of Teach's Hole?"

"Yes, what of it?" demanded Cutter.

"Well," said Atticus, "I ask you: whatever became of the third ship? The *Revenge* was never accounted for, nor was the fourth, smaller ship. According to local legend in North Carolina, Blackbeard moved all the treasure from his two main ships onto the *Revenge* and proceeded to sink the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and the *Adventure* himself in an effort to downsize his operation. By coincidence, it just happened to be the same day Maynard attacked. The treasure has never been found to this day."

Oscar Cutter looked incredulous. He stood up and began pacing back and forth. "Are you saying the *Revenge* sailed all the way around the Americas to the West Coast? To Oregon? You realize how preposterous that is, I hope? This was years before the Panama Canal was even thought of! It was too small of a sloop to make such a long journey!"

Atticus held up his hands in exasperation. "I know, I know! And yet my discovery seems to suggest that is exactly what happened!"

"Well, what was your discovery, Mr. Jones?" Pete wanted to know.

Atticus Jones stared blankly at the empty trunk. "Buried beneath the sand and silt of Ocracoke Peninsula was what I believed to be the bowsprit of Blackbeard's third ship, the *Revenge*."

"What's a bowsprit?" asked Bob.

"A bowsprit," explained Jupiter, "is a long pole or carving attached to the front of a ship. In those days they were often in the shape of a beautiful woman or mermaid."

"Jupiter's right," said Atticus. "But the *Revenge's* bowsprit was carved in the shape of a giant, four foot falcon. Its talon's and

beak were cast in bronze, and its eyes were red rubies!”

“And that’s what you found?” demanded Aunt Mathilda. “A giant bird?”

“Not exactly,” said Atticus Jones, shaking his head. “The wood probably disintegrated hundreds of years ago. What I found was a single bronze claw on the sea bed – exactly the size and shape as a claw that would fit on a four foot wooden falcon!”

4

On The Case!

“RIDICULOUS!” Oscar Cutter laughed. “It is simply too wild a tale to believe!”

“I know it sounds incredible,” admitted Atticus Jones, “and it is entirely possible that the claw could be from a different ship altogether. But the possibility – the million to one chance that Blackbeard’s treasure might be scattered across the floor of the Ocracoke inlet... well, even you, Cutter, the great skeptic, must admit that it’s a pirate hunter’s dream!”

Oscar Cutter waved a hand in the air in annoyance and strode to the door. “Do you want to know what I think, Jones? I think you’ve got nitrogen bubbles in the brain from too little time in the decompression chamber. You’re not making any sense! And now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be on my way. The university isn’t paying me to chase wild legends. They demand real evidence.”

He turned to Titus and Mathilda, ignoring the boys. “It was very nice to meet you.” With that he turned stiffly and walked out to his car.

Pete scratched his head as he watched the blond haired man drive off in his small white hatchback. “Gee, what’s eating him?” Atticus Jones brushed it off. “Pay no mind to Cutter. He comes from a long line of sailors and he gets very worked up about the subject of pirates. He’s hot-headed, but harmless. He’s a diver too. In fact, he’s got a large excavation under way a few miles north of mine. It’s being funded by the university in Portland, and he’s under constant pressure. The school wants results, or they pull the funding. That’s why I work as an independent. I can’t stand the thought of someone looking over my shoulder as I’m

working!”

Jupiter was still thinking about the black-clad intruder. He prodded his uncle. “Do you have any idea who it might be, Uncle Atticus? I mean, who would break into your home? It would appear that items from salvaged shipwrecks would be a hard thing to fence. There’s not exactly a huge market for anchors and lead shot.”

Atticus Jones looked down his nose at Jupe. “Jupiter, my boy, that is a very astute observation. And I know just who the scoundrels are that are breaking in to my house!”

“You know who it is?” Pete gaped. “Well why didn’t you say so? We can go to the police!”

“Ahh...” said Atticus, “no proof, young Peter. But with the help of The Three Investigators, I should be able to acquire enough proof to put a few of the New Pirates of the West behind bars for some time!”

“The New Pirates of the West?” said Bob with excitement. “You mean there are actually real live pirates in Anchor Bay?”

Atticus laughed and smiled merrily, closing the lid and sitting down on the chest that, until recently, had been home to the bronze claw. He didn’t bother to re-latch the now empty trunk.

“Not quite pirates, Bob, although they call themselves pirates. The New Pirates of the West is an organization of men and women from Southern California all the way up to Washington who claim heritage to some of the oldest bandits on the West Coast. Pirates like Black Jack Sebastian, Captain Ronald “Peg Leg” LeForge, Salty Jon Waters, and Black Peter Blanch. Many have no substantiating proof other than the same last name, but a few are actually true descendants.”

“Pirates in Anchor Bay,” snorted Aunt Mathilda, “now I’ve heard everything! The very ide...” she muttered, returning to the

pile of old maps she was tidying up on Atticus's cluttered desk.

Jupiter ignored her and turned to his uncle with a rather pleased look. "I deduce that the New Pirates of the West are opposed to any salvaging of shipwrecks, particularly pirate ships, as they feel you are disturbing the final resting places of their ancestors."

"Simply amazing!" boomed Uncle Atticus. "That's just what they're doing! Everytime I go out on a salvaging expedition, I've got to deal with three or four motorboats circling my vessel. Their boats churn up the water and make diving very dangerous for me. But I won't quit! I've dived in some of the worst conditions, and a little rough water isn't enough to frighten Atticus Jones!"

"But now it's more than rough water," Titus pointed out. "Now they're breaking and entering and stealing your property."

"That's true," agreed Atticus. "And I can't explain it. Like I said, it's only about once every two weeks or so, and they only take one thing whenever they strike. I've never actually seen any-one. Oscar spotting one this morning was the closest we've come. I think they're just warnings to let me know that the pirates are watching me – trying to frighten me into stopping my dives. There probably won't be another incident while you're here."

"Can my associates and I assume that you would like to retain the services of The Three Investigators?" asked Jupiter in his most professional manner.

Aunt Mathilda rolled her eyes and shook her head as Atticus Jones dug into his battered wallet and produced a twenty dollar bill. "A retainer fee," he said, handing it to Jupiter. "There will be twenty more for each of you if you can catch the thieves who took the bronze claw before you leave in two weeks!"

Jupiter couldn't help but grin. He loved nothing more than a challenging mystery, and his mind was already spinning in high

gear on this one. “Do you know where we can find the local chapter of the New Pirates of the West, Uncle Atticus?”

“Indeed I do,” the man with the oversized mustache said, “but I’m not telling you!”

Jupiter, Pete, and Bob looked startled. “W-What...” Jupe began to say. He stopped when he saw his uncle’s wolfish grin.

“That is, I’m not going to tell you until we’ve put a hot meal of eggs and ham and orange juice in each of your growling bellies!”

5 The New Pirates

AFTER THEY had eaten a huge breakfast at a quaint little diner in downtown Anchor Bay, The Three Investigators headed up the crowded boardwalk brimming with tourists, following Atticus's directions to the headquarters of the New Pirates of the West.

"Uncle Atticus says that Anchor Bay is really turning into a tourist trap," Jupiter remarked, observing a family that was buying bagfuls of saltwater taffy from a street vendor. "Some are attracted to the fishing tours, others enjoy the quaint little shops and diners. There's even ski-ball, video arcades, and go-kart tracks for kids. I guess everyone is trying to cash in on the tourist trade. That's why Atticus is opening up his own antique store. He figures he might as well make a profit off of all the old stuff he's collected over the years. Here's his shop now."

The boys stopped in front of little store crammed between a candle shop and a tea emporium. They cupped their hands to peer through the large plate glass window. The inside of the store stood empty and silent. A sign on the door read:

"JONES MARITIME ANTIQUES"

Atticus Jones, Proprietor

Grand Opening June 8th

The boys purchased some taffy and chewed on it as they continued strolling along the wooden boardwalk. They had walked several more blocks and were almost at the edge of the small business district when Bob cried out.

"Look!"

Jupe and Pete followed his gaze to the rooftops. Flying from a flagpole on the side of a dilapidated old fire station was a large black flag with a white skull and crossbones in the center.

“A jolly roger,” said Pete. “Fellows, I think we’ve found our pirates!”

“Do you think we should all go in together, First?” Bob asked Jupiter.

The chubby boy shook his head and thought for a moment.

“It would be better if just one of us went in. There’s no sense in all three of us showing our faces when we might have to tail someone later on.”

“I vote Jupe goes,” said Pete. “He’s better at this sort of thing. I never know what to say.”

Bob agreed. “He’s right, First. You’re much better at coming up with a cover story on the spot than the two of us.”

Jupiter sighed at his partners. “Both of you need the practice at getting information. But since we haven’t much time in Anchor Bay, I’ll go.”

“Meanwhile, Pete and I will snoop around the outside of the building,” said Bob, “see if we can spot anything suspicious.”

“Meet at the end of the block in twenty minutes,” instructed Jupiter as he headed in the direction of the old fire station.

“If I haven’t returned by then, go on back to Uncle Atticus’s house and wait for me there.”

Bob and Pete agreed and headed around the block in the direction of a narrow gravel alley which ran behind the rustic old buildings.

As Jupiter approached the headquarters of the New Pirates of the West, he let his shoulders sag and his pudgy face droop. He had been a child actor on television once, and acting came second nature to him. He was very good at appearing like a slow-witted

kid when he wanted to. He pulled on the tarnished handle and a large copper bell above the door rang out. When he closed the door behind him the bell rang out again.

Jupe stood by the front door and surveyed his surroundings. The old fire station was in the process of being refurbished. The smell of fresh paint and sawdust hung heavily in the air, and he could see sawhorses and planks and hammers and nails scattered about the the large front hall. He stepped forward into the dimly lit room and called out, his voice carrying throughout the emptiness.

“Hello! Is there anyone home?”

There was no answer. He looked at his wristwatch and saw it was only nine forty-five. Too late for breakfast, and too early for everyone to be out to lunch. The First Investigator moved even further into the room and called out once more.

“Hello? Anyone here?”

Jupiter barely had time to register a strange screeching noise from somewhere above him before he found himself face to face with a sneering, bloodthirsty pirate! He gasped and took a few startled steps backwards, bumping into a sawhorse and knocking a hammer and a bag of nails to the floor with a crash!

The snarling pirate was dressed in a tricorn pirate’s hat, a long scarlet captain’s coat, black knee-high leather boots, and a white ruffled shirt. Worst of all, he held a wicked looking dagger clenched between his gleaming white teeth.

When Jupe saw the knife clenched between the pirates teeth, he quickly found his wits.

“Your costume is quite convincing,” he said, regaining his composure, “however, your teeth are much too white for a real pirate. For a more convincing effect, you should visit a theatrical shop and purchase some fake teeth.”



The menacing pirate stood up straight and cocked his head to the side. He removed the dagger from his mouth, wiped the blade on his pants and grinned. “Okay, I’m not a real pirate. But admit it – for a second you were really scared.”

Jupiter realized that he had forgotten all about using his dumb kid act when the pirate had caught him off guard. It was too late to revert back to it. “Not scared,” he said, a little miffed, “‘startled’ would be a more accurate description. I had temporarily forgotten the fact that this building once was a fire station. I didn’t comprehend the brass pole I was standing next to was actually the old fire pole that firefighters used to slide down.”

The pirate raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Anyone ever tell you that you talk like a dictionary?” he asked. “Anyway, my name is Gaspar St. Vincent. Well, actually, my real name is Francis Shoe. But who ever heard of a pirate named Francis? So just call me Gaspar.”

Jupiter shook the friendly pirate’s hand, and then got down to business. “Are you the only one that works at the New Pirates of the West, Gaspar?”

“Actually no one works here,” Gaspar explained, “we’re a non-profit organization. Everyone is strictly volunteer. The only thing we require for membership is some kind of ancestry to a pirate of the past. Are you here to join?”

Jupiter thought quickly. “Uh, actually I’m doing a project on pirates for summer school. I had heard of the New Pirates of the West from my uncle and thought it sounded perfect for the paper I’m writing. Would you mind being interviewed?”

Gaspar tugged on the lapels of his long-coat and held his chin high. “I suppose I could give the cretins upstairs a break for mutton and mead. Follow me, ya scurvy dog!”

Jupiter chuckled at the pirate’s corny dialogue as he followed

him up a spiral staircase to the second floor of the old fire station. He couldn't help thinking that Gaspar St. Vincent would fit in perfectly with Jeremy Joy's "Purple Pirate Lair" routine that he and Bob and Pete had sat through while solving *The Mystery of the Purple Pirate*.

When they reached the top of the stairs, Jupiter's eyes went wide and his mouth dropped open in surprise at what was displayed on the second floor.

The entire level was one huge room that resembled a museum. The walls were decorated to look like the interior of a sailing ship, with huge wooden steering wheels from ancient vessels, nets, anchors, and sails twenty feet high. In the middle of the room were displays in glass cases. Each display held artifacts like guns, knives, eating utensils and clothing. A thorough description of each item was neatly tacked to the side.

But the most stunning thing to Jupiter was the wax figures. Throughout the room Jupe counted at least a dozen lifesized wax sculptures of some of the most infamous pirates in history. There was Blackbeard standing next to Caesar, and Red Anny right beside William Evans. Each figure was sculpted in intricate detail, from the whiskers on their chins to the cutlasses on their belts. To Jupe they looked real enough to jump off their pedestals and stage a mutiny!

Gaspar went on with a narrative that was obviously rehearsed.

"The New Pirates of the West is an entertaining and educational attraction for the whole family that will be open nine to five during the summer months, and twice a week from nine to two o'clock when the tourist season ends – that is, if we can get all the work done before the grand opening. Unfortunately the grand opening is in two weeks and we've barely even started working on the first floor."

“You say ‘we’,” Jupiter interrupted, looking around, “who else is here?”

“Ah, silly me,” sighed Gaspar, “the rest of the gang is on the roof. This is an old building you see, and we’ve had to put a lot of work into restoring it. Thank goodness many of the founding members of the New Pirates are doctors and lawyers. I’m afraid the roof was in dire need of a fresh coat of tar. The rest of my crew is up on top slopping it on. Do you want to meet them?”

Jupe was about to say that that was not necessary, but the strange Gaspar St. Vincent was already bounding up the steps leading to the roof. “Follow me!” he cried.

Jupiter walked up the stairs and stepped into the bright sunshine. On the rooftop were two men and a girl, all dressed in similar pirate attire. They were just finishing with the tar.

Gaspar turned to Jupe with a red face. “I’m sorry, young man, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Jupiter Jones.”

“Fantastic!” cried Gaspar. “A true pirate’s name if I ever heard one!” He turned to the three pirates with the tar mops.

“Attention on deck! Bosuns Bly, Peterson, and O’Reilly, I’d like you to meet Master Jones. He’s doing a report on pirates for summer school.”

The three pirates put their tar mops into sticky black buckets and ambled over. A large, muscular man with an eye-patch lit a cigarette. “Which school?” he said in a gravelly voice.

“Excuse me?” said Jupiter, puzzled.

“Francis said you’re here for summer school. Which school?” repeated Bly, his one eye squinting at Jupe in a discerning fashion.

Jupe didn’t hesitate. “Rocky Beach Junior High. It’s a summer program for extra credit in history class. I’m doing a report on

pirates.”

“Never heard of it,” said Bly suspiciously.

“It’s quite a ways south of here,” explained Jupe smoothly. “I’m here on vacation.”

“Sounds fishy to me,” the beefy pirate muttered as he sulked off down the stairway.

Gaspar patted Jupe on the back as they watched the pirate head downstairs. “Never mind Connie Bly. He’s been working all morning in the sun. Next thing you know he’ll have you tied to the yardarm for fifty lashes.”

A pretty young girl with blond hair and braces smiled and shook Jupe’s hand. She was not much older than Jupe, and wore a striped shirt with a handkerchief tied around her head.

“Hi! My name is Ashley O’Reilly. My dad is a member here. I just volunteer sometimes for the community service.”

The second pirate nodded at Jupe and smiled. “Good to meet you son. I’m Vic Peterson, a founding member of the New Pirates. Do you have any pirates in your ancestry? That’s all it takes to join you know. Heck, even if you don’t we could sure use some volunteers who are handy with a saw and hammer. Do you have any friends that might be interested in some community service?”

Jupiter smiled politely and then explained he would only be in Anchor Bay for two weeks. Besides, thought Jupiter, he preferred exercising his brain rather than his muscles.

Gaspar smiled at his fellow pirates. “Why don’t you finish up and then knock off for lunch.”

Gaspar led Jupiter back downstairs. When they had reached the first floor, Jupe turned to the pirate. “Mr. St. Vincent, I couldn’t help but notice all the display cases on the second floor. I was under the impression that the New Pirates were against salvaging

sunken pirate ships.”

“And we are!” Gaspar said passionately. “Everything you see up there is an exact replica. A replica is a copy of the real thing, but I’m sure you already knew that. The whole point of the New Pirates is to educate the masses and stop the plundering of our heritage! But since we are not yet open, how, may I ask, did you know that we are opposed to such destruction of our ancestral history – not to mention the coral reef which provides a home to millions of species of marine life?”

Jupiter could see no harm in telling Gaspar the truth. The pirate seemed very friendly. “My uncle is Atticus Jones, the diver who is working a salvage site about two miles down the coast. He said that members of your organization have been circling their boats, protesting his work.”

At this revelation Gaspar’s eyes grew narrow and cold.

“So! You’re related to him? I should have you walk the plank just for that alone!” The bell above the door clanged as Gaspar threw it open. He virtually shoved Juve out onto the sidewalk.

“Until your uncle stops his destruction of the burial sites of our forefathers, consider yourself banned from the New Pirates of the West! I bid you good day, young Jones.”

“B-b-but...” Jupiter stammered helplessly.

“Ah-ah,” Gaspar cut him off, shaking a finger. “And don’t let me see you around here again!” he proclaimed – right before slamming the door in Jupiter’s face!

6

The Man In Black

AS JUPITER INVESTIGATED the inside of the old fire station, Pete and Bob made their way around to the back of the building. From the rear they could see that a narrow service alley ran behind the business district, allowing delivery trucks to drop off loads of merchandise.

Pete thought one of the businesses must be a restaurant, because he could smell the delicious scent of seafood cooking. Even though he had just eaten, he licked his lips and inhaled deeply.

“I smell crablegs,” he moaned. “I bet Jupe can smell them all the way inside the fire station.”

Bob ignored his partner and kept walking. A steep embankment of pine trees and scrub brush stood on the other side of the alley, facing the ocean. The scrub turned into large breaker rocks, and then several feet of sandy beach before miles of water stretched out to the horizon.

Pete eyed the waves and sighed. He had a natural affinity for the water, and sometimes felt he would rather be on the ocean than on an investigation. But whenever he felt like that, Jupe or Bob were usually there to remind him that The Three Investigators were on a case.

“Earth to Second,” said Bob. “Don’t worry Pete, there will be plenty of time to get out on the water before we leave.”

“I hope so,” the bigger boy grumbled. “I was hoping to get some scuba diving in with Jupe’s uncle. I want to find some of Blackbeard’s pirate treasure to take back to Rocky Beach!”

The two Investigators were nearing the rear entrance of the

New Pirates of the West when Bob stopped in his tracks. He quickly dodged around some garbage bins, pulling Pete with him.

“Hey...” Pete yelped.

Bob held a finger up to his lips and pointed to the old fire station. “Someone’s coming out the back door,” he hissed.

Pete peered over the tops of the garbage cans and spied a very large man in a pirate costume opening the back hatch of a small white car. The man had a red bandana tied over his head in the style of pirates the boys had seen in school books, large hoop earrings, and an eyepatch.

“Wow, he’s a tough looking character,” whispered Bob. “He sure looks like a real pirate!”

“You’re not kidding,” Pete agreed. “It’s not hard to imagine him being related to old Blackbeard.”

Pete and Bob peered over the tops of the garbage cans again. They watched as the thickly muscled pirate lit a cigarette and then removed his costume vest, replacing it with a leather vest that he fished out of the small car’s rear hatch. He slammed the hatch shut and was about to climb into the car when the unexpected happened.

The lid of the garbage can in front of Pete suddenly fell to the ground with a clatter, and a wild-looking tom-cat bolted from the container, meowing fiercely. Startled, Pete let out a cry and fell backwards, knocking over even more garbage cans.

Bob thought for a split second that the pirate hadn’t heard the commotion. But then the seedy looking man threw his cigarette to the ground with a curse and came charging in their direction.

Bob gulped and looked around wildly for a way out. He knew Pete could outrun the pirate, but he wasn’t so sure about himself. His gaze fell on a large grey door that said “SERVICE ENTRANCE.” He pulled Pete up and threw open the door. The

pungent aroma of seafood hit their noses at once.

They were inside the kitchen of the seafood restaurant Pete had smelled earlier! Pete quickly pulled the door closed and latched the bolt lock.

“Let’s go!” Bob commanded.

The two Investigators threaded through the steamy kitchen as fast as they dared, drawing quizzical looks from the numerous waiters and cooks in white coats. Bob narrowly avoided a collision with a waiter carrying a huge tray of lobsters, and then had to pull Pete away from a bubbling pot of clam chowder.

“We can eat later,” he said. “Let’s get back to Jupe’s uncle’s house!”

The boys bolted through the swinging doors leading to the dining room, causing the few patrons that were there to stop in midbite and stare. They burst out the front door and onto the boardwalk, looking around them for any sign of the hulking pirate.

“Coast is clear,” announced Pete. No sooner had he said that than the two boys heard a car engine revving up and tires squealing.

“Not yet!” said Bob. They raced down the boardwalk and then crossed the street, dodging inside the doorway of a dingy little tavern called “The Seven Seas Lounge” – Pete pausing long enough to get the name of the restaurant across the street.

“The Captain’s Hook,” he grinned, making a mental note and licking his lips at the same time. “You know how Jupe is – he wants to know every last detail of our reports.”

Bob rolled his eyes and then stuck his head out the door.

He could see the menacing pirate stopped at a red light just thirty yards away. The pirate scanned the area for the boys, then roared away down the street with a screeching of tires.

Pete wiped sweat from his brow. "Wow, that pirate sure didn't like being spied on."

"You can say that again," said Bob. "He's just the type of guy I'd send to harrass someone into stopping their salvaging."

"You think that's the guy breaking into Uncle Atticus's home?" asked Pete.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "He's a member of the New Pirates and he has a very short temper. I'd say he's a prime suspect!"

The boys thought about this as they made their way back to Atticus Jones's house. When they arrived, Jupiter wasn't back yet, and the house stood silent except for the constant lapping of waves against the Queen Anne's Revenge.

They decided to walk out onto the dock and enjoy the sunshine while waiting for their friend to arrive. They hadn't gone far when Pete heard a heavy, clunking noise that caused him to turn around.

"What was that?" he said.

"What was what?" asked Bob, skipping a rock out into the bay.

"Maybe I'm a little jumpy from all the excitement this morning, but I think someone is aboard Uncle Atticus's ship!"

Before Bob could reply, a sinister looking man, dressed from head to toe in black, sprang from the ship and sprinted up the steps of the dock, running in the direction of the road!

Pete never hesitated when it came to giving chase – as the Second Investigator, it was what he did best. He immediately sprang into pursuit of the Man in Black. But the villian had too great of a head start on Pete, and by the time the tall boy had reached the end of the block, the Man in Black had reached a battered black sedan and was roaring away, leaving Pete coughing in

a cloud of exhaust.

Panting, Pete jogged back to where Bob was waiting. As experienced Investigators, Pete knew all the questions Bob was about to ask before he even asked them.

“No, I didn’t get a good look at his face, and no, I couldn’t read the license plates,” the tall boy panted.

Bob rubbed his chin and looked at Pete.

“This case is just keeps getting curiouser and curiouser!”

7

The Bronze Claw

WHEN JUPITER had returned to his uncle's home, he found Bob and Pete waiting for him on the front stoop. He sat down beside his friends and grinned.

"Did I ever have an interesting visit at the New Pirates of the West..."

Pete could hardly contain himself. "I'll bet it wasn't nearly as interesting as our adventure!" Pete went on to describe their encounter with the pirate named Bly, and with his chase of the Man in Black, with Bob chiming in from time to time to add details that Pete forgot. Jupiter was fiercely pulling his lip as he heard each new clue.

"Fascinating," he said finally when Pete and Bob had finished their tale. He then took his turn relating the events at the New Pirates and how Gaspar St. Vincent had banned him from returning. He summed up his story by saying: "This case just keeps getting curiouser and curiouser!"

"That's just what I said!" Bob burst out. "We've doubled our list of suspects in one morning!"

Jupe decided The Three Investigators had better make a thorough search of "The Queen Anne's Revenge," but when their examination proved fruitless, the boys walked out onto the end of the dock and flopped down in the sun.

"You're sure you didn't recognize the Man in Black?" prodded Jupe.

Bob shook his head and pushed up his glasses. "He had on a black fedora and sunglasses. He had no facial hair, and was wearing a black suit and tie. He could be anyone."

“Hmmm,” Jupiter thought to himself. He stood up and began pacing on the dock. “The insertion of the mysterious Man in Black into the puzzle is unexpected and doesn’t fit with certain theories I had been forming about this case. Our search of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* didn’t show anything to be disturbed. But when my uncle returns we’ll have to ask him to inspect his boat and see if anything is missing.”

“Who do you think the Man in Black could be, Jupe?” asked Pete.

“Maybe the pirate that chased Pete and I?” volunteered Bob.

“I don’t think so, Records. Remember, he must have left the old fire station immediately after I talked to him on the roof.

You saw him leave in the opposite direction of Uncle Atticus’s house. Since you two came here immediately after, he would not have had enough time to change clothes. And why change at all? No,” Jupe said at last, “he’s definitely someone we have to keep an eye on, but I don’t think he’s the Man in Black. The same logic also seems to rule out Gaspar St. Vincent.”

“Maybe he’s Captain Cutter,” Pete exclaimed. “Maybe he’s jealous of all your uncle’s discoveries and is taking some for himself. He could even be a kelptomaniac. Maybe he can’t help himself from stealing treasures!”

“That’s a possibility I was considering,” Jupe admitted.

“When he left this morning he said he was going to his excavation site. There’s only one way to find out if he ever showed up!”

The boys all rushed to the house, and, using the key Jupe’s uncle had provided, let themselves inside. Bob quickly found Atticus Jones’s rolodex of important phone numbers and leafed through them until he found Oscar Cutter’s office number at the university in Portland. Bob dialed the number and an icy recep-

tionist informed him that he was out at the salvage site and had been all morning. They next tried Captain Cutter's mobile-phone number. When Cutter answered the phone on the other end, Bob could barely hear him amid the swell of the ocean and commands being shouted by the deckhands on board his ship.

"Hello. Cutter speaking," he shouted above the clamour.

"Hello? You'll have to speak up, I'm having trouble hearing you!"

Bob quickly hung up the phone and looked at his partners.

"That doesn't prove he's at his salvage site, but it sure sounded like he was on a boat somewhere."

Jupiter thought for a moment. "It shouldn't be too hard to verify if he was at his site today. I think we can conclude that the Man in Black is not the musclebound pirate named Bly, nor Captain Cutter."

"What do we do now?" asked Pete.

Jupiter mulled this over for a moment and then shook his head. "We need to ask my uncle and Captain Cutter if they've ever seen anyone matching the description of the Man in Black. It would appear that he's the thief that has been breaking into my uncle's house."

"Do you think we should stake out the New Pirates and see what Bly and Gaspar are up to?" suggested Bob. "Bly sure was suspicious of your summer school routine, and he definitely didn't like Pete and I spying on him!"

"An excellent suggestion, Records," Jupiter agreed.

"Here's what I propose: I will stay here and keep an eye on Uncle Atticus's place in case the Man in Black returns. You go to the old fire station and see if Connie Bly returns. Pete can borrow Uncle Atticus's old bicycle and ride up the coast to Oscar Cutter's salvage site. Ask around to confirm that Cutter has been there all

morning – and when you have an opportunity, ask him if he has noticed anyone dressed all in black loitering around his site, or at my uncle’s house.”

Pete rolled his eyes at Bob. “I’m not sure what loitering means, but the rest made sense!”

Bob laughed and slapped Pete on the back. “Just think how much your vocabulary expands every time The Three Investigators get a case!”

Jupiter ignored his friends’ good-natured teasing of his penchant for big words. He was fairly used to it by now. He cleared his throat importantly and proceeded. “There’s one more thing we need to discuss before we tackle our various assignments,” he announced stuffily.

Bob and Pete looked at their chubby friend, somewhat confused at what aspect of the case they hadn’t covered. “What’s that, Jupe?” asked Bob.

Jupe grinned and shouted over his shoulder as he raced to the kitchen. “Lunch!”

When Bob had returned from his stake-out of the old fire station, he reported that Connie Bly had not returned for the day, and Gaspar St. Vincent had simply locked up and went home to his apartment located just across the street from the New Pirates headquarters.

It was nearly dark when Pete came coasting down the gravel drive on Atticus Jones’s battered old bicycle. Titus, Mathilda and Atticus had long since returned from their shopping trip, and, after Jupiter had related the events of the Man in Black lurking on the boat, Atticus had made a careful examination of its contents and declared nothing to be missing.

With Jupe’s help, he proceeded to put a heavy-duty padlock

on the cabin door, and then they all sat on the front porch drinking iced tea and listened to Atticus tell a tale of pirates and booby-traps and booty.

Atticus paused in his narration when he saw Pete coming down the drive. "Why, young Peter! Where have you been off to all the live-long day?"

Pete made a point to look tired and hungry and generally miserable. "Off on another one of your nephew's wild goose chases!" he complained bitterly. "Captain Cutter was aboard his salvage ship all afternoon, and got a ride home from a friend. When I asked him about the Man in Black, he said he couldn't be sure. He said it sounded like the same man he chased this morning."

"You're investigating Cutter?" Atticus asked in surprise.

"What in heaven's name for?"

"He seemed like a perfect gentleman to me," Aunt Mathilda objected. "I don't want you boys harrassing him – he's got enough on his mind with that ship sailing in pactly on top of his excavation!"

"Ship?" Jupe exclaimed. "What ship?"

Uncle Titus kicked her ankle, and Aunt Mathilda clapped a hand over her mouth. "Oh, rats!" she gasped.

Atticus Jones looked crossly at Aunt Mathilda. "Woman, you couldn't keep a secret if your life depended upon it!" he sighed. He turned to look at the boys. "First tell me what your interest is in my friend Oscar Cutter, and then I'll tell you about the ship which was supposed to be a surprise."

Jupiter sat on the wide porch railing and crossed his legs. He looked like a sun-tanned Buddha in a Hawaiian shirt. He clasped his hands and made a steeple of his fingers. "What exactly was Captain Cutter doing here so early in the morning, Uncle Atticus?"

Atticus Jones took a sip of tea and frowned at his nephew. “Oscar Cutter was here this morning as a favor to me. Since we are both early risers, I asked him to stop by before he headed out to his site so he could examine some large cannons I had discovered last week. Cannons are his specialty, you see – I needed to know if they were of the military caliber, or could be fitted for use on a smaller pirate sloop like Blackbeard’s.”

“You don’t think Oscar has been breaking into my house, do you? I’ll admit he’s short tempered, but he’s no crook!”

Jupiter didn’t hesitate. “As far as we know, he’s the only one besides Bob and Pete that has actually seen the thief. I’ll admit it doesn’t seem likely that he’s the Man in Black, but we can’t positively rule him out.”

Atticus Jones looked long and hard at his nephew, then smiled. “I trust your judgement as an investigator, Jupiter. But I don’t mind telling you that I think you’re barking up the wrong tree with Captain Cutter. I’ve known him for over a year and he’s been nothing but open and honest with me. It sounds like this Man in Black is the one we should be searching for.”

Pete’s eyes lit up. “Now tell us about this boat or ship or whatever!”

Uncle Atticus laughed heartily. “Well, it was supposed to be a surprise – but I guess there’s no harm in telling you a little early. Two days from now, a ninety-foot, three-masted Dutch Flute very much like Blackbeard’s own *Queen Anne’s Revenge* will be sailing into Anchor Bay, docking just yards away from Cutter’s salvage site. It’s part of a publicity program being sponsored by the university to help raise donations and public awareness so Cutter can continue his work. Oscar was able to get us special access privileges so we can tour the entire boat – not just the top deck like the general public!”

Atticus sat back, his eyes sparkling. "What do you think of that?"

"Wow!" the boys exclaimed in unison.

"A real pirate ship," Bob shouted. "I'll have to stock up on film for my camera!"

"Terrific!" Pete crowed. "I can hardly wait!"

The boys could barely contain their excitement, and they chatted enthusiastically as they went inside to prepare for bed. Since Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda were taking the spare bedroom in the house, the boys were given permission to sleep out on the boat with Atticus. They quickly grabbed their sleeping bags and pillows and headed for the back door.

Before they got there, Jupiter stopped and stared at the old trunk that his uncle had kept the Bronze Claw in until it was stolen. He had a curious expression on his face.

"Enough mystery for one day, Juve," Pete complained. "Let's investigate how fast we can fall asleep."

Jupiter shook his head and pinched his bottom lip. He stood for a full minute utilizing his photographic memory, trying to recall what he had seen earlier about the trunk that was now different.

Aunt Mathilda called out from the spare bedroom. "I don't want you boys staying up till the crack of dawn. You'll need your rest for the chores I've got planned for you tomorrow."

"I don't like the sound of that," said Bob. "Come on, Juve. Let's hit the sack."

But Jupiter wouldn't budge. He stood his ground until a light seemed to gleam in his eyes. His pudgy face suddenly broke into a smile and he marched over to the trunk.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "This trunk has been moved!"

"Aunt Mathilda probably tidied up," yawned Bob.



Jupiter pinched his lip. “Yes, but when Uncle Atticus closed the trunk this morning, he didn’t bother to re-latch the brass catches on the front.”

“So what?” said Pete. “So your uncle isn’t the tidiest person in Anchor Bay. Look around this place. There’s junk everywhere.”

Suddenly Bob understood what Jupiter was driving at. “Wait a second,” he said. “If your uncle simply closed the lid of the trunk this morning, then why are the brass catches back in the latched position?”

“Exactly,” Jupiter said grimly. And with one quick motion, the First Investigator kneeled down, undid the latches, and threw open the lid.

Sitting in the bottom of the trunk was the Bronze Claw!

8

The Dutch Flute

“GLEEPS!” Pete exclaimed. How did that get back in there?”

Jupiter removed the tarnished falcon claw and held it up to the light in wonder. “I don’t know, Second, but I’d sure like to find out!”

“That must have been what the Man in Black was doing here today,” guessed Bob, “returning the Bronze Claw to the trunk.”

“But why?” demanded Pete. “That doesn’t make any sense. Why go to all the trouble to steal it – just to return it later on?”

The boys were silent for a moment while they thought about this. “Maybe it’s a forgery,” volunteered Bob. “Maybe the Man in Black took it long enough to have a fake made, and kept the real claw for himself.”

Jupiter shook his head. “Not likely. This claw looks very, very old to me. The bronze has turned green and it’s covered with barnacles. This claw has obviously been underwater for many years. That’s not something you can fake.”

“What do we do with it now?” Pete wondered. “We can’t leave it in the trunk.”

Jupiter grinned at his friends and headed for his uncle’s boat. “I have an idea.”

The next morning, Jupiter awoke early and felt at the bottom of his sleeping bag with his feet. The Bronze Claw was still there. He fished it out and held it in his hands. “How and why did you get back here?” he wondered to himself.

After a few moments, Jupe roused Bob and Pete and the three boys trooped inside for breakfast, Jupe carrying the claw hidden

behind his back.

Titus and Atticus were seated at a kitchen table that was cluttered with sea artifacts. Aunt Mathilda had insisted on at least clearing enough space to make room for plates and silverware - and she clearly wasn't pleased with the lack of cooking space on the stove and countertops.

"Heavens to Betsy!" she muttered as she poured pancake batter into a skillet. "How in the world you cook anything around here with all this junk is simply beyond me, Atticus Jones!"

Atticus ruffled his newspaper and puffed heartily on his pipe. He grinned at the boys as they came in the back door, then disappeared once more behind the opinion section of his paper.

Jupiter glanced at his Uncle Titus who had his nose buried in the funny pages. With a wink to Bob and Pete, he quietly set the Bronze Claw down in the middle of the cluttered table.

Soon, Aunt Mathilda brought a heaping plateful of steaming pancakes and sizzling sausages to the table. She glanced at the Bronze Claw and knitted her brows, saying to Jupiter in a stern voice: "That's a very nice souvenir, boys, but please remove it from the kitchen table."

"I believe it makes a very pleasant center-piece," Jupiter said, trying to keep a straight face. "Perhaps with some flowers it might look even more lovely. What do you think Uncle Atticus?"

Atticus Jones grunted behind his newspaper, but didn't waver from the headlines. Aunt Mathilda failed to see the humor in Juve's prank. "I don't know what's gotten into you young man, but I never thought I'd see the day when you would risk losing a plate of hotcakes over a joke!"

Pete couldn't take it anymore and he burst out laughing.

He was quickly followed by Bob and then Jupiter. Soon, all three boys were practically on the floor, howling with laughter.

Aunt Mathilda stood with an open mouth, watching the spectacle. Titus and Atticus finally put their papers down to see what all the fuss was being made over.

Suddenly, Atticus Jones's eyes went wide and he stood up like he had been stung – his pipe dropped out of his mouth and fell into the syrup on his plate. "Well shut my mouth and paint me red!" he bellowed. "I can't believe my eyes!"

He picked up the Bronze Claw and held it out before him as if it were made of solid gold. "Wh - what - wh - where..." he stammered.

Still chuckling, Jupiter explained how the claw had reappeared the night before, and then apologized to Aunt Mathilda for his little joke.

"That ugly hunk of metal is what all the fuss is about?" Aunt Mathilda demanded. "That's the priceless treasure we had to see to believe?"

"Well... yes!" Atticus agreed, nodding his head in wonder. "Finding the bowsprit of Blackbeard's third ship, the *Revenge*, means that it either sank on the West coast instead of the East, or it was plundered and the treasure hidden away. Either way, it's of vast historical importance!"

"It looks like a big hunk of green junk to me," said Titus.

"I like my junk to be useful, that way you can make a profit. Who would want to steal that anyway?"

Aunt Mathilda huffed as she served the pancakes to the boys. "They obviously didn't want it if they brought it back. They probably realized it was just a useless lump of green metal."

Jupe's Uncle Atticus ran his fingers lovingly over the claw and smiled. "Well, it looks like this case is closed, eh? I guess I owe you three some money for finding Blackbeard's claw. That was the agreement, right?"

“No sir,” Jupiter said between mouthful’s of pancakes. “The Three Investigators were retained to find out who took the claw and why, and then return it to its rightful owner. We’ve got the claw, but we still don’t know who the Man in Black is, and why he wanted it in the first place.” He took another bite and smiled. “I’d say this case is just getting started!”

Pete groaned as he sliced a sausage link in half. “I had a feeling you would say that.”

After the boys had eaten breakfast, they accompanied Atticus to the hardware store where he purchased a padlock that claimed it was indestructable, which he promptly put on the trunk holding the Bronze Claw.

Jupiter was itching to resume the investigation, but was soon disappointed when they arrived back home. Aunt Mathilda had a long list of chores she wanted done, and the boys knew better than to argue with Jupe’s aunt when it came to work. They reluctantly set to work, and it was two days before they found a free moment to discuss the case in any detail.

During this time Jupiter had arranged the pieces of the mystery in his mind like a puzzle, trying to fit them all together. It seemed to the First Investigator that there were too few pieces to get an accurate picture. The Man in Black had not returned since Bob and Pete had chased him two days before, and it appeared to be business as usual at Oscar Cutter’s salvage site, and at the New Pirates of the West headquarters.

Jupiter remained stubbornly quiet as he and his friends rode in the back of the pickup truck on their way to see the Dutch Flute exhibit. Bob and Pete were accustomed to their friend’s moments of deep concentration while on a case. They found it best to let him be – he would talk when he was good and ready.

As Uncle Titus drove the salvage yard truck through the

downtown business district, and then along the coast highway leading out of town, the boys' anticipation ran high. They could now see the towering masts of the Dutch Flute – its sails rolled up and flags fluttering in the breeze.

But their excitement soon came crashing down when they saw the zoo of people milling about the docks and boardwalk – each eager to get on board the majestic vessel. Cars were lined up for almost a half-mile along the side of the road, and the small parking lot adjacent to the local boat access was overflowing with campers and tourists fighting for a place to park.

Uncle Titus muttered under his breath but continued up the highway until he had found a suitable place to park. The group jumped out and began hiking back to the overcrowded boat access.

Bob looked doubtful as their group neared the throng of people waiting in line to see the flute. He shook his head as he inserted a new roll of film into his camera. “Gee, with all these people waiting, we may never get on board.”

“Never fear, Robert,” Atticus boomed, “I see my good friend Oscar Cutter as we speak.”

Titus Jones's younger brother waved his arms and whistled to get Cutter's attention. The handsome salvage expert smiled and waved back from the deck of the ship – motioning for them to head to the front of the line. This did not rest well with several tourists who had been waiting in line trying to juggle children and cameras and cola bottles for the better part of an hour. They protested loudly when The Three Investigators were let right on board.

“Gee, I feel like we're at Magic Mountain,” Pete said dryly.

Oscar Cutter met the group at the top of the gangplank. The charming smile he wore for the crowds soon disappeared.

“Disaster!” he cried. “Utter disaster! Look at all the junk they’re throwing into the water! Have they no brains? The food will attract fish, the fish will churn up the sediment. A week of work will be ruined, and all for a stupid publicity stunt!”

The group stood for a moment in uncomfortable silence, not knowing what to say. “But think of all the donations,” Jupiter pointed out. “You’ll probably make enough money to keep your site open for another year!”

Captain Cutter looked ashamed at his outburst. He blushed and ran a hand through his sun-bleached hair. “I’m sorry. I guess I just get a little keyed up over ignorant people polluting the water. I hope you’ll forgive me. Now, how about that tour I promised you?”

The boys nodded their heads in excitement and Oscar Cutter gave a genuine smile for the first time that morning. “Okay! Why don’t we start down below so we can get away from the mob?” The salvage man gave directions to a deck hand in a university tee-shirt to take over for him, and he led the group below deck.

For the next hour, the boys, Aunt Mathilda, Uncle Titus, and Atticus were treated to a thorough tour of the magnificent Dutch Flute. Bob snapped pictures like crazy as they learned all about the galley, the cargo holds, the sleeping quarters, and numerous other seafaring compartments through startling tales of the pirates and privateers who sailed the great ships.

When they at last emerged into the bright sunlight of the top deck, the boys felt worn out from all the information they had absorbed, and Aunt Mathilda looked positively weak from the tales of bloodshed. Oscar Cutter graciously shook everyone’s hand and thanked each of them for coming out, apologizing again for his outburst.

“Don’t get me wrong,” he said gravely, “I really do appreciate

the university setting up this event. It's just the careless disregard..." his voice trailed off as a strange look clouded his deeply tanned features.

Jupiter followed the salvage man's gaze down the gangplank and out into the circus-like atmosphere of the crowd. He scanned the multitude of faces until his eyes fell upon a man leaning against a black sedan. The man was wearing a black fedora and sunglasses and seemed to be looking right at them.

It was the Man in Black!

9

The Plot Thickens

OSCAR CUTTER stammered, “th-that is to say, it’s the careless disregard for our natural resources that really infuriates me.” Jupe nudged Bob as the handsome seaman quickly ushered the party down the gangplank, thanking them again for stopping by. “I hope you’ll excuse me, I really must be getting back to the tours.”

“What’s up, First?” Bob hissed between clenched teeth.

Jupiter flashed his eyes over to the Man in Black. Bob spotted him – he was wearing a light-blue button down shirt and black tie today, but it was definitely the same man. “How many shots do you have left in your camera, Records?”

Trying to keep an eye on the thief, Bob quickly glanced down at the shot indicator – a ‘1’ appeared in the tiny window. “I’ve only got one shot left, First,” he reported grimly.

The stocky First Investigator began to thread through the growing crowd in the direction of the Man in Black. “Try to make it count!” he advised.

When they had reached the first line of cars, Jupiter and Bob looked around helplessly. “Where did he go?” they asked each other.

“Who are we looking for?” Pete wondered.

“The Man in Black!” Bob shouted, pointing to the parking lot exit. The Man in Black was sitting in his sedan, waiting for traffic so he could pull out onto the highway. “There he goes!”

The Three Investigators gave chase, but the man found an opening in the traffic and pulled out just as they reached the exit.

Bob quickly snapped off his remaining shot, hoping to get the mysterious intruder on film.

“Missed him!” he cried.

Pete stopped to catch his breath. “What was the Man in Black doing at the Dutch Flute with all these tourists?” he asked.

“A more important question, Second,” said Jupe with a smug smile, “is how does Oscar Cutter know the Man in Black? He looked positively frightened when he spotted him in the crowd!”

“Gosh!” said Bob. “We finally establish that Captain Cutter is not the Man in Black, but in the process we find out that they know each other!”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “I fear we’re running out of time to solve this case. I vote we confront Captain Cutter right now and see exactly what he knows about the Man in Black!”

“I second that motion,” agreed Pete.

“Motion carried!” said Bob, jogging back to the Dutch Flute. “But we better tell your Uncle Atticus that we’ll meet him back home for dinner.”

“Agreed,” Jupiter nodded.

When that was done, the three boys went to the end of the line to await their turn to get back on the mighty ship. It was nearly thirty minutes later when they were once more led up the gang-plank. Oscar Cutter looked startled to see them. He wiped his brow with a handkerchief and smiled weakly at them.

“Couldn’t get enough?” he asked lamely.

Jupiter held himself at his most erect and jutted out his chin – just as he was capable of seeming like a dim-witted kid, he was also able to appear much older and wiser. This was used to great effect when dealing with adults.

“You may recall that my associates and I are investigators,” he began, handing the diver one of The Three Investigators’ business cards. “We have been retained by my uncle to look into the robberies that have taken place at his residence. We hoped we might

ask you a few questions.”

Cutter’s brow furrowed and he ushered the boys into the quiet coolness of the lower deck. When they had reached a cramped cabin, he spoke very seriously. “Anything I can do to help my friends. What would you like to know?”

Jupiter confronted him. “What is your relationship with the man in the black hat and sunglasses that Bob and Pete saw breaking into my uncle’s boat, and whom we just observed leaving this exhibit?”

Oscar Cutter flushed. “That scoundrel? That villain? He’s one of them!” The ill-tempered salvager hurried them back to the top deck and over to the stern of the ship. He pointed a quivering finger out towards the water and fumed. “See? See what I have to put up with?”

The Three Investigators looked out to the ocean in surprise.

From their vantage point they could see three small moto boats not more than fifty yards out waving large white banners which read: “GRAVEROBBERS!” “LET THE DEAD REST!” and “WOULD YOU DIG UP A CEMETERY?” They hadn’t noticed the protesters the first time they boarded the Dutch Flute.

Oscar Cutter looked ready to boil over. “Harrassing me and my crew while I’m diving is one thing – but threats while I’m at home, on land, is quite another. I won’t stand for it, I tell you! The man in the black hat and glasses is just another one of their scare tactics. He’s trouble – I’d advise you to stay far away from him! Especially since they know you’re Atticus Jones’s nephew.”

A crowd had gathered and stood staring at the irate diver.

Jupiter was momentarily speechless, but he quickly regained his composure. “I - uh - well, you can understand – we only needed to be sure,” he said quickly. “Well, thank you for your time, Captain. We should really be going.”

With that, Jupiter turned on his heel and walked quickly away with Bob and Pete following close behind. He let out a breath of relief when they had reached the parking lot.

“Wow! That guy is on the fast-track to a nervous breakdown!” said Bob.

“I’ll say,” echoed Pete. “I’ll bet his blood pressure is through the roof!”

The boys started their long walk back to Jupiter’s uncle’s house. Bob spoke up: “Well, we found out how Cutter knows the Man in Black – he’s a tough-guy for the New Pirates.”

Jupiter looked thoughtful. “But every time we answer a question regarding Oscar Cutter, a new question pops up.”

“What do you mean, First?” asked Pete.

“Well, specifically, how did Cutter know that I told Gaspar St. Vincent I was Atticus Jones’s nephew? Shouldn’t he have said: ‘especially if they *find out* you’re his nephew,’ instead of ‘since *they know* you’re his nephew?’”

“Gee, that’s right,” said Pete. “How would he know you told Gaspar that unless he’s talked to one of the ‘New Pirates?’ And he sure doesn’t seem like the type of guy who would strike up a friendly conversation with one of them!”

“Maybe it was just a figure of speech,” Bob suggested. “He was so worked up, I doubt he even knew what he was saying.”

“That’s a possibility, Records,” Jupe mused. “Still, it wouldn’t hurt to keep an eye on him. This investigation seems to have stalled out. We’ll need to double our efforts if we’re to figure out who the thief is before we leave next week.”

“Well, now that we’ve decided that, what should we do about lunch?” asked Bob.

Pete grinned. “Fellas, it just so happens that I know a great place for crab legs!”

10

Jupe And Pete On The Trail

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS continued to puzzle over the case while enjoying a filling lunch of crab legs. Jupiter instructed Bob to review his notes and give a brief summary of the suspects who might have a motive to steal the Bronze Claw.

“Forget who swiped it,” Pete exclaimed, “I want to know who brought it back!”

Jupiter took a bite of seafood. “For the moment we’ll have to concentrate on the suspects. Hopefully, the criminal’s actions will become clear once we’ve deduced who the culprit is.” He nodded to Bob. “Proceed with your notes, Records.”

Bob flipped open the small spiral notebook that he always carried in his back pocket. “Let’s see,” he began, pushing up his glasses, “there’s the mysterious Man in Black who was chased by Mr. Cutter the morning we arrived, and later the same afternoon by Pete. According to your uncle’s friend, he’s associated with the New Pirates, and has been harrassing your uncle and Mr. Cutter for several weeks. Next we have the New Pirates of the West, including Gaspar St. Vincent and Connie Bly. Gaspar is passionate about stopping your uncle’s salvaging, but doesn’t seem like a thief. On the other hand, Bly has the appearance of someone who might resort to burglary strictly for profit. That leaves Oscar Cutter – who may be motivated to sabotage your uncle out of professional jealousy – although if that were the case, he wouldn’t have returned the Bronze Claw.”

The studious boy flipped his notebook closed and took a sip of his cola. “That about sums it up, First. What do you think?”

Jupiter picked up the last crableg on his plate and debated

whether or not to eat it. “My uncle may be right about Cutter,” he said, dipping the leg in butter, “if he simply mis-spoke earlier because he was irate, then I guess he’s clean.”

“That leaves three people from the New Pirates on our list of suspects.” Lost in thought, he absent-mindedly popped the crab leg into his mouth. “And there are only two places where we’ll be sure to find members of the New Pirates of the West - at the old fire station, or circling a salvage site.”

Noticing that his plate was now empty, the First Investigator smiled guiltily and called for the bill. “I suggest we split up. Bob can take my uncle’s bicycle this time and tail Cutter home from the Dutch Flute exhibit; and Pete and I can see if Connie Bly shows up at the New Pirate’s headquarters – and everyone should keep their eyes open for the Man in Black!”

When the bill had been paid, Jupiter reached into his shirt pocket and produced three pieces of chalk – one blue, one white, and one green. He handed the blue one to Pete, and the green one to Bob. The chalk was an ingenious idea of Jupe’s that he had devised on a previous case. They allowed the Investigator’s to leave a trail of question marks if they ever got split up. Almost no one noticed a question mark chalked on the sidewalk or on the side of a fence – adults usually passed it off as some kind of childish game. But to The Three Investigators, it was a valuable clue.

“It always pays to be prepared,” Jupe lectured as the boys stepped out onto the sunny boardwalk. “I didn’t think we’d need these on our vacation, but I packed some in my suitcase just in case.” He looked at his wristwatch. “Let’s meet back at my uncle’s in five hours. Uncle Atticus is cooking lobsters tonight, so don’t be late!”

“Ugh!” Pete groaned. “How can you even think about food after that huge lunch?”

The boys all laughed as Bob went in the direction of Atticus Jones's house to fetch his bicycle, and Pete and Jupe walked towards the New Pirates of the West's headquarters.

Since it was a weekday, the crowds of tourists on the boardwalk had thinned, allowing the two Investigators to make good time to the old fire station. After agreeing to whistle twice as a signal if they saw anything suspicious, Jupe sat down on a park bench across the street at an angle from the front door of the old brick building. Pete climbed a fire escape several doors down from the rear entrance.

From Pete's vantage point he could see a Mercedes and a Jeep parked behind the fire station. He didn't see the small white hatchback that Bly had been driving several days before.

The boys had been on surveillance numerous times, and were all quite used to long, boring stretches of time in which not much happened. This looked to be one of those days. After two hours, Jupe bought a sno-cone from a street vendor, and then some cotton candy. Up on the fire escape, Pete climbed down to retrieve a battered lawn chair someone had thrown out with their trash. He hauled it back up to his position and stretched out his long legs with a smile.

Another hour passed. It was starting to get very hot. Jupiter moved to another park bench that was in the shade of a small elm tree.

Up on the fire escape, Pete was miserable. There was no shade from which to escape the beating sun, and he was very thirsty. He looked at his wristwatch for the hundredth time and sighed. He hoped something happened soon. Although he had eaten an enormous lunch, his stomach was actually starting to rumble.

At precisely five o'clock, the owners of the Mercedes and the Jeep stepped out the back door carrying paint buckets and tool

boxes. Pete sat up and peered over the rusty railing. He didn't recognize either of them, but it hardly mattered – the two simply climbed into their cars and drove off.

Pete sighed and was about to look at his watch again when the back door opened once more.

It was Gaspar St. Vincent!

Pete watched as the man in the pirate costume dropped his keys once, then locked the door. The Second Investigator thought the pirate looked very agitated – he walked so fast down the alley he was practically running! The tall boy held his breath as Gaspar strode right beneath him. The pirate then walked several more feet and turned left into the back entrance of a drug store. Pete put his fingers to his lips and whistled twice.

From the park-bench that he was now sharing with several pigeons, Jupiter sat up straight. He had heard Pete's warning whistles. The First Investigator watched the storefronts eagerly. He suddenly saw why Pete had whistled. Gaspar St. Vincent was practically running out of a drug-store several doors down from the fire station. The lanky pirate looked both ways, then ran across the street.

Jupe's eyes went wide.

Gaspar was heading right for him!

Jupiter bent down and pretended to tie his shoe. Gaspar St. Vincent, otherwise known as Francis Shoe, didn't seem to notice as he walked within two feet of him! Jupe was so close to the New Pirate that he clearly registered a look of worry on the man's face. He watched with interest as Gaspar entered a door beside "The Seven Seas Lounge" and raced up a flight of stairs two at a time.

Presently, an out-of-breath Pete Crenshaw shooed away the pigeons and joined his partner on the bench. "Did you see Gaspar?"

Jupe nodded his head. "His apartment must be above this drinking establishment. His face looked like something terrible had happened. What did you see?"

"Nothing..."

Before Pete could say more, Gaspar was back out the door. The two boys tried to look invisible, but it hardly mattered. Gaspar, wearing a fresh pair of clothes, walked right by them without a word.

"Do you think he saw us?" asked Pete.

"Who cares?" Jupe cried. "Maybe we've finally got a break in this case. Let's follow him and see where he goes!"

The two Investigators started after the pirate, being careful to stay a safe distance behind in case he turned around. At the end of the block, the tall man turned right and disappeared. Jupe and Pete hurried to the corner and peered around.

"He's getting into a car!" Pete cried.

Jupiter kicked himself mentally as they watched Gaspar pull his small blue sportscar into traffic. "Why did we give Bob the bicycle?" he muttered. "We'll just have to try to keep up on foot for as long as possible."

Due to traffic and a couple of lucky red lights, the boys were able to follow the sports car for several blocks. But when Gaspar turned onto a main thoroughfare, they could only stand helplessly and watch him speed away.

"We've lost him," Pete moaned.

Jupiter watched with a sinking feeling as the car grew smaller and smaller in the distance. When the vehicle was nearly out of sight, his heart suddenly leapt. He saw breaklights and a turning signal! He grabbed Pete's arm.

"Come on! It may not be too late!" The boys ran harder than they ever had in their lives. Even so, Gaspar's car had turned left

and disappeared before they were even half of the way to their goal.

Pete shook his head and slowed to a trot. “It’s hopeless,” he panted. “He could be a mile away by now!”

Jupiter refused to give up. “I don’t think so, Second,” he croaked, picking up the pace. “If I’m not mistaken, that’s a residential district he’s turned into – a dead end! We passed it on the way out of town to see the Dutch Flute.” Ignoring the racking pains in their sides, the boys continued running. When they finally reached the street where Gaspar had turned, red-faced and sweaty, Jupiter looked triumphant.

“Yes!” he crowed, pointing a finger half-way down the block. Pete wiped the sweat from his brow and grinned. Gaspar’s blue sportscar was parked in front of a small apartment building!

A sign read: LYNDALANE APARTMENTS. The boys snuck up as close as they dared on the far side of the street and then ducked behind a tall hedge.

They watched in fascination as Gaspar had an animated conversation with someone on the apartment’s intercom. They were much too far away to hear what was said, but Gaspar was clearly upset. His arms waved wildly and he repeatedly pushed numbers on the intercom’s keypad.

“Gee, whoever lives there sure doesn’t want to let him in!” said Pete.

“Look who’s coming down the sidewalk,” Jupiter hissed. Pete could hardly believe his eyes. It was the Man in Black! He was wearing a purple short-sleeve shirt and white tie, and his customary black fedora and sunglasses. He approached the apartment complex and then turned up the short walk leading to the front doors. He appeared to be talking to Gaspar.

Jupe was nearly bursting with curiosity. “I wish we could hear

what they're saying!" he moaned. "Maybe we can get closer."

Pete shook his head. "They'd see us for sure. The only car in front of the apartment building is Gaspar's. Maybe..."

He broke off when the two men walked down the short sidewalk together. They stopped in front of the little blue sportscar and the Man in Black gave something small to Gaspar, then turned to walk away. The boys followed him with their eyes and watched him climb into his own car which had been parked several doors down.

Putting the small object into his pocket, Gaspar St. Vincent climbed into his own car and the two men drove off in different directions - the Man in Black passing directly in front of Jupe and Pete. Jupiter didn't hesitate. Deciding to risk being caught, he darted out from behind the hedge and jogged along the sidewalk long enough to catch a glimpse of the Man in Black's license plate number. He quickly committed it to memory.

"DLH 555," he reported when Pete had caught up with him. "Perhaps Chief Reynolds in Rocky Beach will be able to tell us the identity of the mysterious Man in Black!"

Pete nodded to the front doors of the apartment complex.

"Let's see who Gaspar was talking to."

The two boys walked over to the front door of the small building and Pete ran a finger down a list of four names - each with a call number designated for the keypad beneath.

The names read:

- 1 • ADRAGNA, R. #1113
- 2 • KANE, H. #8216
- 3 • VEBBELL, E.D. #0505
- 4 • MOTT, H. #0915

Pete's brow furrowed. "I don't recognize any of these names. I wonder who Gaspar was so hot to talk to?"

"There's only one way to find out," Jupiter said in a grim voice. "We'll have to go door to door." Jupe took a moment to devise a quick cover story, and then the boys began knocking on doors. Five minutes later, they had talked to everyone except KANE, H. in apartment two. All were complete strangers to the boys.

Pete made a notation of the apartment's address on the palm of his hand, then scratched his head with his pen. "Do you suppose the Man in Black is this H. KANE fellow?"

"It's a possibility," Jupiter conceded as he marched around the side of the building. "Let's see if we can look in any of the windows – perhaps we'll see something that will give us a clue."

The two investigators found the windows for H. KANE's apartment. Only one window had its curtains drawn open. The boys cupped their hands to the glass and peered inside.

H. KANE's apartment was a cluttered mess. A desk overflowing with papers and receipts was situated on the other side of the window. Stacks of magazines and newspapers with greyhound dogs and horses on them were piled haphazardly on the desk and chair.

"Looks like it's the maid's day off," Pete deadpanned.

"Those are racing periodicals," Jupiter informed him. "It looks like Mr. Kane is a gambling man who likes to frequent the racetrack."

"So what?" Pete shrugged. "Everyone has to have a hobby. I want to know who the Man in Black is – not what he does in his spare time!"

Jupiter headed down the sidewalk and marked a large white "?" on an oak tree in the apartment's front yard with his chalk,

and another smaller one on the curb. He dropped the chalk into his pocket and clapped his hands together in satisfaction. "Let's see if Chief Reynolds can tell us who he is, Second. Maybe DLH 555 equals H. KANE!"

11

Live And Let Live

WHEN BOB had retrieved the battered bicycle from Uncle Aticus's house, he quickly made his way out to the Dutch Flute exhibit. Pulling up at a bike rack, he observed that there was only a moderate crowd of tourists today. A sign hanging from the bow of the ship announced that the Dutch Flute exhibit would be moving on to Canada tomorrow.

Bob looked around for a good place to watch both the Dutch Flute and the two small protest boats idling in the small bay.

The small boy smiled when his eyes fell upon a bait shop nearby. He strolled over and dug in his pocket for money. "Who says a stake-out has to be boring?" he said to himself, slapping a ten dollar bill on the counter. A pretty girl in a bright pink bikini top stepped up behind the cash register. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to rent a pole and some bait, please," he grinned, feeling quite sure Jupe would not approve of his stake-out methods. Bob laughed at the thought of himself carrying a big fish home while on a case. That's what Jupiter Jones gets for finding a mystery while on vacation!

The girl set the equipment on the counter with a charming smile and wished Bob luck. He blushed and headed out onto the pier, choosing a spot with a good view of the Dutch Flute.

After carefully baiting his line, the small boy executed a perfect cast. He began the slow process of playing the line while gently reeling in, just as his father had taught him several summers ago.

While he fished, Bob could see Oscar Cutter on the deck of the flute, explaining his salvaging process and telling of the his-

tory of the great ship. The man looked very bored and slightly irritated with the tourists. Bob noticed the protesters in the two small boats also looked bored, and were clearly lacking the enthusiasm of the day before.

Hours passed and Bob guessed he would most likely have just as much luck fishing as he would on the stake-out. Then he felt a nibble on his line. Suddenly his fishing reel was running and his pole was bowed by the pull of a large fish! Excited, Bob pulled on the pole with both hands. Twenty yards away Bob saw a rainbow flash of scales as a large fish broke the surface, thrashing mightily in the air before plunging back into the bay. Bob's heart raced. He had never caught a fish half this size before. Jupe and Pete would be dumbfounded! He was just deliberating whether to eat the fish or have it stuffed when a movement on the Dutch Flute made his heart sink.

Oscar Cutter was leaving! Bob frowned and reeled in as hard as could, trying to watch the fish and Cutter at the same time.

The salvage man was handing a clipboard to a university student and seemed to be giving instructions. He then patted the student on the back and walked down the ship's gangplank and across the boardwalk just as Bob pulled the enormous fish out of the water and onto the pier!

Bob quickly pulled the hook out like an expert fisherman and craned his neck to see which direction Cutter was heading. He couldn't see past the huge ship! Knowing very well that he couldn't carry the fish around with him as he followed Cutter, Bob's heart sank even further. Just then, the pretty girl in the pink bikini who had rented the pole to him came striding up the boardwalk with a camera.

"That's a beauty!" she said. "Want me to take a picture? It only costs a buck."

“Sure,” Bob sighed, holding the fish out before him. “At least now I’ll have proof.”

The girl snapped the picture. “What do you mean, ‘proof’?” she asked, trading Bob the picture for a dollar bill.

Bob looked brokenhearted as he tossed the giant fish over the rail and watched it swim away beneath the waves. “Live and let live, that’s what I say,” he shrugged in dejection.

Bob jogged off the pier and headed for Cutter. “Thanks for the picture!” he called over his shoulder.

When Bob reached the Dutch Flute, he stood on the pier railing to see above the crowd waiting to get on board. Bob’s mood went from bad to worse when he saw that Oscar Cutter wasn’t going anywhere. He had only walked the short distance from the flute to the next pier where a small dinghy was kept to take Cutter’s salvage team from the dock to the excavation site fifty yards out.

Bob felt like crying! He had let the catch of his life go for nothing! The studious boy watched morosely as the handsome salvage expert motored out to his empty vessel. The two protest boats took little notice – apparently choosing to stay in their position near the flute.

Bob wondered what Cutter was doing on the salvage boat all by himself – the distance was too great to see clearly. Probably just checking up, making sure his sensitive sonar equipment hadn’t been tampered with by any of the New Pirates, he decided.

In an effort to get his mind off the fish and back onto the case, Bob jogged back to the small bait shop where he had rented the pole.

“Want to try your luck again?” the girl in the pink bikini laughed. “I won’t charge you if you want to use the pole again.”

Bob smiled appreciatively. “No, thanks. I was just wondering

if I could ask a favor of you.”

“Sure,” the pretty girl nodded.

“I don’t suppose you have a pair of binoculars I could borrow for awhile. It’s really important – I’ll just be down the pier, over by the Dutch Flute exhibit.”

The girl agreed and searching beneath the counter of the bait shop, handed a pair of glasses to Bob. “Just be sure to bring them back,” she warned. “They’re my boss’s. I might get fired if he knew I loaned out his good binoculars to a stranger. Say, are you from around here?”

He grinned and shook his head. “No, my friends and I are just here on vacation. Well, thanks for the glasses. I promise I’ll return them.”

Bob put the binoculars to his eyes once he had reached the long dock directly in front of Cutter’s salvage site. He was surprised to see Cutter suiting up in his diving gear. Bob remembered one of the first things The Three Investigators had learned in their diving classes back in Rocky Beach was never to dive alone.

When the salvage expert had strapped on his air tank and mask, he looked around quickly in the direction of the New Pirate’s protest boats, then plunged into the water.

Bob lowered his glasses. What could be so important that it couldn’t wait until the Dutch Flute sailed out tomorrow? Bob barely had time to think of an answer to his own question. Minutes later, the salvager emerged and began climbing up the ladder on the side of his boat.

He could see that Cutter was holding a small object in his hand. It looked like some kind of gun – probably one of those blunder-thingy-ma-jigs he had talked about at Uncle Atticus’s. Its brass fittings on the flint-lock and wooden grip gleamed in the sun.

Bob retreated from the dock when he saw Cutter stripping off his gear and stowing it away. He was coming back ashore – and he was carrying the gun! Bob crossed the boardwalk once more and returned the binoculars to the girl at the bait shop.

“Come on back if you want to fish some more,” she hollered after him. “And tell your friends to stop by too. We have the cheapest rods in the bay!”

Bob waved as he ran back to Oscar Cutter’s pier. The diver was just locking down his small dinghy. Bob blended into the crowd of tourists waiting in line for the Dutch Flute exhibit, then ran for his bicycle when Cutter threw the ancient gun onto the passenger’s seat of his small white hatchback and began pulling away.

Bob drew a large green “?” on the hot pavement of the boat access parking lot and followed at a safe distance behind.

It seemed to Bob Andrews that the more he peddled, the more questions sprung up in his mind. Like where was Cutter taking the gun? And why weren’t the New Pirate protestors trying to stop him?

12

Calling Rocky Beach!

IT WAS NEARING dinner when Jupiter and Pete had returned to Atticus Jones' house. The boys could smell a succulent aroma of broiled lobsters that made their mouths water halfway down the long gravel drive.

When they entered the house, they could only grin upon hearing the off-key warbling of Titus and Atticus singing one of their favorite sea chanties as they bustled about the kitchen. Aunt Mathilda fidgeted and tried to help with the cooking, but was shooed out by Atticus every time.

"Welcome home, sailors!" Atticus cried when the boys entered the kitchen. "Party of three? We just happen to have a table open with an excellent view of the bay!"

"Tonight's specialties are broiled lobster in butter, tossed salad, and a delightful cheesecake that will entice your taste-buds!" crooned Titus.

Jupiter looked around the kitchen, mildly alarmed that the third member of their firm hadn't returned. "Bob hasn't come back yet?"

"Haven't seen him all day!" sang Titus, chopping up a head of lettuce. "We thought he was with you."

"We split up," explained Pete. "We agreed to meet back here in time for dinner."

"Ah," Atticus winked, "and how goes the investigation? Any promising leads?"

"Possibly," Jupiter admitted, thinking of Gaspar and the Man in Black. "Could we make a long-distance call on your telephone, Uncle Atticus? I promise we'll pay for the charges."

“Charges shmarges. Call whomever you’d like my boy – just don’t make me call you late for dinner,” his uncle boomed.

The two investigators went to Atticus’s cluttered study.

Jupiter found the old fashioned rotary phone and dialed Chief Samuel Reynold’s direct extension at the Rocky Beach Police Department. The Three Investigators had worked closely with the chief on several cases in the past. While the chief regarded them as legitimate detectives, he often felt the boys, and Jupiter Jones in particular, too often poked their noses into business that was best left to the police. With Chief Reynolds there was always a fine line between being a public servant and being a nuisance!

Pete glanced at the large clock and barometer on the wall and looked worried. “Gee, Jupe – it’s after six o’clock. Chief Reynolds may have already gone home for the day.”

But Pete’s worries were unfounded as the chief picked up the telephone on the third ring. He answered stiffly. “Reynolds.”

“Good evening, sir. This is Jupiter Jones calling. May I have a moment of your time?”

There was an audible, reluctant sigh on the other end of the line. “I haven’t got the time, Jones,” the chief growled. “There was a hold-up at the Save-U-More gas station today. I’m up to my neck in paperwork!”

“A hold-up?” Jupiter inquired out of habit. “The Save-U-More on the East or West side?”

“Forget it, Jones,” the chief barked. “Listen, why don’t you go pester some other police chief – say in Mexico?”

Jupiter held his hand over the reciever and whispered to Pete: “He’s in one of his moods. I’m going to have to make this quick.” The stocky boy put the phone back to his ear. “Sir, I understand you’re very busy, but this will only take a moment.”

He held his breath, waiting for the chief to break the silence

on the other end. Finally Chief Reynolds gave in.

“All right, Jones, whaddaya want?”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Yeah, yeah, sure,” the chief chortled, “just make it quick, okay. No big words!”

“We have a license plate we’d like you to check out, sir. Oregon plate number DLH 555. They belong to a black Ford. I believe a late-model sedan four-door. The owner’s name may be ‘H. KANE,’” Jupiter also furnished the chief with the address of the small apartment complex.

“Gee, is that all?” the chief said sarcastically. “Don’t you boys ever do anything normal kids do – like play baseball? Or how about surfing? And what are you doing in Oregon anyway?”

“It’s a long story, sir,” Jupiter assured him.

“I’ll bet. All right. It’ll take a day or two to get the information from the Oregon Department of Transportation. Is that okay with you, Jones? You don’t need me to call the President of the United States next do you?”

“No sir,” Jupiter grinned. “That should do just fine, sir.”

He gave Chief Reynolds his uncle’s telephone number and hung up.

“Wow – that was a close call.”

“How soon until we know?” asked Pete.

“He said it would take a day or two. We’ll have a week left after tomorrow – hopefully that will be enough time to crack this case.”

Aunt Mathilda called out from the kitchen. “Jupiter! Pete! Bob! Wash up, it’s time for dinner!”

At the mention of Bob’s name, both boys remembered that the Research Investigator hadn’t returned yet. They were passing through the back storeroom where Uncle Atticus kept his old div-

ing suit display and the trunk with the Bronze Claw inside when Jupiter stopped suddenly and clapped his hand to his forehead.

“It’s gone!”

“You mean *he’s* gone,” Pete corrected. “Where do you suppose Bob could be?”

Jupiter stood with his hand on his forehead and shook his head helplessly. “No – I really mean *it’s* gone! *Look!*”

He pointed to the trunk. The same trunk that Atticus had just bought the heavy-duty padlock for. The trunk that held the Bronze Claw – only to have it stolen and then returned. It now stood vacant and empty, its lid split open as if from violent blows by an axe!

“Someone stole it again!” Pete yelled.

“I can’t understand it,” Jupe murmured as he inspected the battered trunk. “Why steal it, only to return it later on and then steal it again? It doesn’t appear to be the act of a rational mind.”

He stood up and strode over to the back door, pushing on it. The door swung open easily. “The lock on the door has been destroyed, too,” he reported grimly. “Someone went to a lot of trouble to get their hands on the claw.”

“Again,” Pete pointed out. “Maybe that has something to do with Bob missing dinner. It would have to be important for Records to miss broiled lobster and cheesecake!”

Jupiter nodded and pinched his lip. “We better go tell Uncle Atticus,” he decided. “Then start looking for Bob – he may be in real danger.”

The boys headed glumly for the kitchen. They hated to have to give up such a fantastic meal, but Bob needed their help. Jupiter reported that the house had been broken into again, and the Bronze Claw had been stolen once more. The good mood at the table soon turned to quiet disbelief.

“S-stolen,” Uncle Atticus sputtered in indignation. “Again?” He rose from his seat and stormed into the back room.

When the others caught up with him, Atticus Jones stood in front of the bashed in trunk, pulling at his walrus mustache and cursing to the ceiling.

Aunt Mathilda decided she had had enough. Storming to her bedroom, she threw open her suitcases and began to pack, her lips pressed into a hard line. “This place isn’t safe anymore!” she cried. “I want you boys to pack your bags and get your sleeping bags off the boat! I won’t stay in a house where criminals can come and go as they please! It’s not safe I tell you!”

Both Jupiter and Uncle Titus tried to reason with her, but Aunt Mathilda’s stern glare stopped them before they could open their mouths.

Atticus nodded his head morosely. “I’m afraid your aunt’s right,” he said. “It’s just too dangerous for any of us to stay here until this madman is caught!”

Jupiter pulled his Uncle Titus aside.

“Perhaps you should take Aunt Mathilda to the nearest hotel and check us in.”

“And what are *you* planning on doing, my boy?” his uncle said shrewdly. “This is getting to be a dangerous game. I fear it is time to let the police handle this from now on.”

“We’re worried about Bob,” Jupiter explained. “He hasn’t come back from his stake-out of the Dutch Flute. I thought Uncle Atticus could take us out in his truck to look for him. If we can’t find him, then we’ll have no choice but to call the police in.”

Uncle Titus thought for a moment, then agreed and went to help his wife throw their luggage into the back of the truck. He gave Jupe one last warning to be extra careful. “It sounds to me like there’s a dangerous lunatic on the loose around here. I don’t

want you boys going off alone!”

Jupiter promised that he and Pete would try to stay with Uncle Atticus at all times as they all climbed into the trucks.

“Let’s head for the Dutch Flute exhibit,” Jupiter ordered.

“And keep your eyes peeled for question marks drawn in green chalk!”

13

Blackbeard's Ghost

BOB'S LEGS throbbed as he tried to keep pace with Oscar Cutter's white hatchback as it sped back into town. For about the tenth time he wished he had his special mountain bicycle with the five-speed gear that he had gotten for Christmas the year before – it made tailing suspects so much easier. At least in Rocky Beach The Three Investigators had the luxury of Worthington!

Worthington was an English chauffeur that accompanied the vintage Rolls Royce Jupiter had won the use of in a contest the year before. Through the generosity of a grateful client, The Three Investigators were granted unlimited access to the fine auto, and Worthington had become a close friend and “unofficial fourth investigator.”

But Worthington was hundreds of miles away today – and Bob was on his own - chugging away on Atticus Jones's pitiful old wreck of a bicycle!

The fair-haired boy heaved a sigh of relief and began to slow up when he saw Cutter's small car turn onto Main Street.

Being cautious, Bob coasted a safe block behind the salvager.

Puzzled, he watched as Cutter pulled the car into the narrow alleyway behind the small shops that he and Pete had escaped from earlier. Bob parked the battered bicycle in a nearby rack and peeked around the corner.

Cutter was standing at the back door of the New Pirates of the West – and he was holding the pistol he had recovered moments before from the ocean floor! Bob watched and then crept closer for a better look.

What was a salvager of sunken ships doing hanging around

with people who protested and harrassed him? At first Bob thought the diver might be selling the gun to the New Pirates as a prop for their museum. But then he remembered Jupe saying something about all their displays being imitations of the real thing – besides, any treasure Cutter found would surely be the property of the university which was funding his expedition.

Moments later the door opened and Cutter was silently admitted into the still blackness of the old fire station.

Bob bit his lip nervously. What should he do? The Records and Research man didn't like the idea of getting seperated from his chums if he decided to follow Cutter inside. Pete had done that on their last case in England, *The Mystery of the Hitchcock Inheritance*, and ended up being locked in a dark cellar for an entire afternoon! He wasn't anxious to repeat that mistake.

Bob thought gloomily about all the gadgets and gizmos that Jupiter had devised for cases just like this. Fat lot of good they did him now! He fumed at Jupe for only packing their special chalk, but knew he was to blame as well. He should have known that even an innocent vacation can turn into danger when Jupiter Jones is around!

Bob decided the chalk would have to do. He made a large green “?” on the wall nearest to him, and several more as he approached the back door of the New Pirate's headquarters. When he had reached the door that Cutter had entered, he knelt down and drew another “?” on the bottom of the door, and a small arrow. Taking a deep breath and summoning all his courage, Bob entered the dark interior.

His nose was immediately met with the fumes of fresh paint and sawdust. The murky room was illuminated only by the sunlight shining through the large plate-glass window that faced Main Street. Bob let his eyes adjust to the dim room for a

moment, then tip-toed forward.

Crash! He had bumped into a sawhorse that had a handsaw balanced on top of it. The noise seemed deafening in the utter stillness of the large structure. Scowling, Bob gritted his teeth and listened. After several minutes of silence in which he felt positive he would be caught in the harsh glare of a flashlight, he proceeded to the front of the room.

Seeing all the tourists on the other side of the large window made Bob feel a little better. He knew that if he ran into trouble, he could at least pound on the glass and call for help – even smash it if need be!

He snooped around the first floor looking for clues, and, feeling a little more confident, began creeping up the stairway to the second floor. Cutter had to be up there somewhere!

When he had reached the top, Bob's confidence wilted.

There were only a few small windows in the large room, and the weak beams of sunlight passing through the grimy glass only served to cast eerie shadows on the displays. He drew another small “?” on the top step.

Bob gulped and moved forward, reaching out with his hands like antanae for any hidden sawhorses waiting to trip him up.

Suddenly his hand touched something that made him break out in a cold sweat. It felt like a human hand but it was clammy and cold. Like the hand of a corpse!

Bob stifled a cry and pulled his hand back in horror. Then, by the faint daylight struggling through the panes, he saw what he had touched.

It was merely a wax statue of William Evans – whom Bob knew better as “The Purple Pirate.” Now that his eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light, Bob could see that there were actually several wax statues placed throughout the hall.

That didn't make him feel any better. His eyes jumped around from statue to statue – when he stopped looking at one, it seemed to move just a little bit. When he looked at another, the previous statue seemed ready to pounce on him.

Biting his lip again, Bob forced himself to continue his search for Captain Cutter. When the small Investigator had made it to the far side of the immense museum without finding a trace of the diver, he let out a sigh of relief. He was almost glad he couldn't find him. All he wanted to do was hightail it out of this creepy room!

Bob decided he had done enough investigating for one day, and he wanted to go home and feast on a king-sized lobster for dinner.

With that decided, Bob began walking quickly, but quietly, down the center aisle, heading back to the steps leading down to the first floor.

“Yaaaaaaaarrrrrgh!”

Suddenly his worst fears were realized. As he walked past the wax statue of William Teach, better known as Blackbeard the Pirate, the towering figure bellowed with rage and leaped off his pedestal and down at him!

The small boy let out a wailing, frightened scream and tumbled backwards into a display case, knocking it to the floor with a mighty crash! Bob scooted across the floor in terror, his brain trying to tell his feet to move – and move fast!

Blackbeard snickered as he approached Bob, his large boots clunking on the floor as he came closer and closer. He had a patch over one eye and a glazed, insane look in the other. Blackbeard pulled a long cutlass from his belt.

“This is what we do with stowaways!” he grinned crazily, running a finger across his neck.



Bob yelped and whirled for the stairs. He only made two steps before he was caught up in a large fishing net that tripped him and sent him tumbling to the floor.

He thrashed at the net wildly, but that only made him even more tangled.

Blackbeard stood over him and sneered. “Perhaps I should keep you alive for bait! I wonder what I could catch with a nosy kid on my hook!” The pirate snickered, sweeping up the ends of the net and dragging Bob along the floor.

“I hope you kissed your mum and da goodbye, matey,” he said menacingly, “for the next one you’ll be greeting is Davey Jones!”

14

Bob's In Trouble!

WHEN JUPITER and Pete had climbed into the cab of Uncle Atticus's truck, Jupe directed his uncle to drive to the Dutch Flute exhibit.

“That's where Records was supposed to be. If he ran into trouble, he may have left a clue for us there.”

The sun began to dip below the horizon, and the sky was awash with brilliant shades of blue, orange and purple. As his uncle pushed the old pickup along the coast road, Jupiter noticed rolling clouds of fog seeping above the waves that crashed onto the beach, and long, tendril-like fingers creeping above the breakers and onto the land. He pinched his lip in worry and wondered what kind of trouble Bob might have run into.

As Bob Andrews was being dragged down the stairs of the old fire station, he deftly managed to pry the green piece of chalk from a front pocket of his trousers. In the gloomy darkness, Blackbeard would never see the long green line that Bob was leaving on the floor as he was dragged to the same back door through which Cutter had entered only moments before.

The pirate turned and glared down at Bob with his one good eye as he bound his wrists and ankles with thick utility tape.

“You'll keep your trap shut if you want to stay healthy. Perhaps I'll make a slave out of you instead of feeding you to the sharks!”

Bob gulped and nodded to the pirate that he understood. As a thick piece of tape was slapped over his mouth, it suddenly dawned on the small boy that both times The Three Investigators

had seen Connie Bly, he was wearing an eyepatch. Bob's suspicions about the true identity of the pirate were confirmed when Blackbeard hauled Bob out in the fishing net and threw him into the back of a small white hatchback, throwing a thick blanket over the top of him.

So Connie Bly was behind it all!

Bob didn't find it hard to believe that the pirate was involved in something crooked. He could only assume Bly was some kind of professional thief who had a client with a special interest in pirate lore or sunken ships.

As the small car jounced along, Bob felt about the floor with his fingers for anything he could use to cut the tape around his wrists and ankles. His fingers touched upon something cold and hard. As he traced his fingers over the rough surface, Bob suddenly realized what he was touching – it was the Bronze Claw! His heart leapt, but only for a moment. The claw would do no good in getting his hands and feet untied. He continued searching around. His hands fell on several scraps of paper, and he instinctively tucked them away in his pockets – perhaps they had names or addresses of the people Bly was stealing for!

When his search for a useful tool came up empty, Bob drew a scraggly “?” on the floor of the car with his chalk, and then busied himself with trying to move the blanket enough so he could see out the back window.

Just as he had accomplished this task, the car jolted to a stop. Looking through the tinted glass, Bob could see the tall masts of a ship silhouetted against the setting sun. Bly had taken him to the Dutch Flute! But why?

Next Bob heard a car door slam and then prolonged silence. Ten minutes passed. He was just beginning to think that Bly had deserted him when the hulking pirate returned and threw open the

back hatch.

The pirate whispered sharply in Bob's ear. "Don't move a muscle. Don't make a sound, or else you're shark-bait! Nod your head if you understand."

Bob nodded his head.

"Good. Remember, not a sound."

The pirate wrapped Bob tight in the blanket and then scooped him up and threw him over his shoulder. Now Bob could smell the saltwater and hear the waves of the ocean. He bounced as Bly raced up the gangplank of the flute. Bob tried to remember the layout of the massive ship, and immediately deduced he was being taken below deck.

Bly stopped suddenly and Bob heard a door open. The thief dropped him like a sack of potatoes onto a cot and removed the blanket and net.

"I don't expect any trouble out of you," he growled. "You know what'll happen..." he sneered, drawing his finger across his throat again.

Bob nodded once more, then, when Bly had left, he used his fingers to tear the tape off his mouth with a stinging rip. Just then Bob remembered his knife. He could have kicked himself! He never went anywhere without his trusty pocket-knife. In his panic he had forgotten all about it!

Bob worked his bound hands into his front pocket. He was grateful that Bly hadn't bothered searching him. His fingers touched the small pocket knife, but it slipped out of his sweaty fingers.

Concentrating fiercely, Bob reached as far into his pocket as he could and gingerly plucked the knife out. Working only by touch, the small boy flicked open the small blade and carefully began cutting the tape holding his hands together.

Within minutes his hands were free. He quickly cut away the bindings around his ankles and then surveyed his surroundings.

He was locked in a passenger cabin on the lower deck of the ship. There was only the single door and no windows except the small porthole in the door.

Bob examined the door. The hinges were too big to move with his little pocket knife – but the porthole looked just wide enough for a small boy to squeeze through! Using the blade of his knife as a screwdriver, the Records and Research man began removing the screws.

It was long work. Sweat dripped from his brow as he anxiously began turning the final screw.

Suddenly he heard voices.

Who was Bly talking to? Oscar Cutter? Were they accomplices? Or was it the Man In Black – or Gaspar St. Vincent?

Bob put his ear to the glass in an effort to make out what the voices were saying. It was no use – they were too far away.

Next he heard footsteps approaching. Bob flung himself onto the cot, dropped his chalk and knife into his pocket, and slapped the tape back over his mouth, wrists and ankles.

He could only hope that Bly wouldn't notice the missing screws in the porthole and that his bindings were cut through!

The menacing pirate barged into the room and swept Bob over his shoulder. "Room service," he jeered. "Time to move you to another location. It's not as spacious, but remember, if you behave you just might live to tell the tale!"

15

No Tricks... Or Else!

“LOOK! ON THE SHIP!” cried Pete.

Jupiter and Atticus peered through the windshield of the old truck as Atticus brought it to a halt in the empty parking area in front of the Dutch Flute.

“I don’t see anything, Second.”

“What did you see, my boy?”

“I could have sworn I saw someone board that ship!” Pete hollered as he jumped out of the truck. “Come on! Maybe it’s Bob!”

Atticus and Jupiter swiftly followed. When they reached the mighty ship, Pete scowled. “I could have sworn...”

The Dutch Flute stood silent and cold in the darkening sky. Fog that was only a foot off the water moments before, now began to creep up the boardwalk and envelope the great vessel. The gangplank was drawn up and a sign was posted on the ship’s bow: “CLOSED.” And below that someone had written: “Thank You Anchor Bay! The Dutch Flute Ships Out At 8:30 A.M.”

The only activity on the waterfront was a small bait and tackle shop fifty yards away that was just closing up for the night. A small white hatchback was parked next to it. A young girl shut off the lights, locked the door, and then rode off on a bicycle. They were all alone on the boardwalk.

Waves lapping gently against the hull of the ship and the creaking of the massive timbers cast an eerie spell when combined with the dense fog. Pete looked around nervously. “Maybe I imagined it,” he whispered. He didn’t know why he was whispering, it just seemed appropriate in the spooky atmosphere.

“Look at this,” Jupiter hissed. Pete and Uncle Atticus rushed over to where the stocky boy was standing. He pointed to the pavement.

A large “?” was drawn on the pavement in green chalk.

“So Bob *was* here,” Atticus breathed. “We better search that ship. Tomorrow will be too late if he’s hidden on board!”

Jupiter nodded grimly and looked to Pete. “You know what to do, Second.”

Pete gulped and looked up at the massive ship. Giant ropes three inches thick were draped from the craft’s side to the thick cement moorings on land. Pete instructed Jupe to hold the line steady and spit on his hands.

Like a circus acrobat, the athletic boy swung onto the rope and hooked his feet together behind him. Without a sound, Pete shimied up the giant rope and grabbed ahold of the ship’s lowest railing. Holding on with both hands, Pete surveyed the deck of the ship for any sign of movement. Satisfied, he swung his feet over the side and rolled on board.

The last of the sun disappeared below the horizon as Pete slid the gangplank down to the boardwalk. Jupiter and Atticus rushed up and climbed aboard. Lights on tall poles that ran the entire length of the boardwalk hummed and flickered on one by one – providing the searchers with enough light to see by.

When they had canvased the top deck, Atticus sent Pete back to his truck for a flashlight. “I’m not going down into the lower deck without a light,” he whispered nervously. When Pete had returned with the light, they headed for the steps leading below deck. “I wish I would have brought a baseball bat, too!” Atticus confessed. “This feels like it may be...”

“A trap?” a gruff voice cut him off. All three held their hands over their eyes as they were caught in the harsh glare of a large



flashlight. "I have a gun," the voice continued, "so don't try to run. Keep your hands up and keep moving below deck. No tricks – or else!"

"Do as he says, boys," Atticus instructed.

They filed into the blackness of the lower deck. "We don't want any trouble, we're just looking for a friend," Atticus offered.

"Shut up!" the voice with the flashlight barked. "Get inside!"

The three were pushed into a large room with a very low ceiling. Several portholes lined the far wall. The streetlights outside provided just enough light to see each other's faces. Jupiter recalled the tour they had been given by Cutter and deduced that they were now in the Captain's quarters.

"Jupe! Look!" Pete cried.

In the far corner of the room sat Oscar Cutter – his wrists and ankles bound with rope! The salvage man sat wide-eyed and fearful. The three were shoved over to where Cutter was sitting and ordered to sit down.

"I – I tried to call out and w-warn you," the diver stammered, "b-but the brute struck me! I feared for my life!"

"Pipe down!" the voice commanded. "Unless you want to get smacked again!"

By the glow of the streetlights filtering in, Jupiter could now see that the voice with the flashlight was Connie Bly. The pirate produced several lengths of rope. He tossed them at Jupiter.

"Tie up your friends. No trick knots, fatty – I'll be tying you up last and then checking your work!"

Jupiter did as he was told, and then allowed Bly to bind his wrists and ankles.

"What are you going to do with us?" Atticus demanded. "Whatever it is," he bluffed, "you won't get far. The police are on their way!"

Bly eyed Atticus shrewdly, his one good eye gleaming in the lamplight. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, old man. I'm going to make you walk the plank, just like I did with the other little kid detective! Now keep quiet. Remember, I have a gun," he threatened, storming out of the room.

When the pirate had gone, Pete turned to Jupiter. "Did you hear what he said about Bob!" he cried in alarm.

"I'm sure he's only bluffing," Jupiter replied, trying to sound confident as he studied the knots on the rope binding his wrists.

"Jupiter's right," agreed Atticus, "he's a petty thief, not a murderer."

"I wouldn't be so sure," Oscar Cutter moaned. "It would be best to do as he says so we don't have to find out!"

Even with his hands tied, Jupe could still manage to pinch his bottom lip in deep concentration. "I was just thinking..."

He stopped abruptly, a strange, satisfied look appearing on his round face. From outside they all heard the distinct sound of a car door slamming.

"Thinking what, First?" Pete cried. "Please tell me that you have a plan!"

But Jupiter remained silent as the sound of footsteps approached the Captain's quarters. Connie Bly entered the cabin and grinned maliciously, his one good eye gleaming. He marched over to Jupiter and grabbed him roughly by the shirt.

"Okay tubby, what say you and I take a walk – a long walk off a short plank!" He cackled wildly and began dragging Jupiter along the floor.

Suddenly, lights blazed on everywhere, momentarily blinding everyone in the room.

"Nobody move!" a rasping voice shouted from the doorway.

Jupiter raised up on his knees and gaped. He looked quickly

at Pete and Atticus, who also stared at the doorway in astonishment.

It was the Man in Black – and he was holding a gun!

16

Man In Black – Unmasked

“DON’T MOVE!” the Man in Black snarled. “Unlike you, Bly, my gun is *real* – so I would listen, and listen good!”

The criminal dressed like Blackbeard dropped his pistol and slowly raised his hands. “Who are you?” the pirate bellowed, “and how do you know my name?”

With the lights on, Jupiter could now see that Connie Bly’s gun was a blunderbuss – most likely a prop from the New Pirate museum. He then looked to the Man in Black. The mysterious stranger had a chiseled jaw and cold, piercing eyes. A wicked scar ran down his right cheek.

In the distance the group heard the sound of police sirens quickly approaching.

Bly looked desperately from Oscar Cutter to the Man in Black. “We can make a deal,” he said quickly. “I’m not the one you want anyway,” he cried, pointing at Cutter. “He’s the one you’re after! It was all his idea!”

“What?” Cutter wailed, his face contorting in rage. “Me? This man is delusional! I’ve never met him before in my life!”

Jupiter watched this exchange with bemused interest, then nodded his head at the Man in Black. “I know who he is,” the stout First Investigator volunteered sunnily.

Uncle Atticus and Pete looked at Jupiter, dumbfounded.

“You do?” they cried together.

Jupiter nodded smugly and turned to the man in the black fedora. “Unless I’m very much mistaken, he’s a private investigator.”

The Man in Black stood silent. Pete looked from him to

Jupiter and back to the Man in Black. He knew that Jupe's guesses were usually right – but Pete often had trouble following his partner's methods of deduction.

“And just how do you know that, First?”

Still bound by ropes, Jupiter managed to sit next to Pete. “Because the police are just outside, and he is making no move to escape. Therefore he is not a criminal. He has a gun, but has not attempted to arrest Bly. Therefore he is not a police officer. Since many detectives are licensed to carry a firearm, I deduce that he is a private investigator.”

The Man in Black nodded his head. “Smart kid,” he said. “The boy's right – I *am* a private investigator. My name is Seth Cooley, and I...”

Cooley lowered his guard for a moment and Bly pounced.

With a roar he barreled past the detective, sending him reeling. The gun fired a deafening blast into the ceiling. Bly sprinted up the stairs to the upper deck. They heard another startled cry from up above, followed by a splash.

Cooley picked himself up slowly and dusted himself off.

“He won't get far,” he snorted, looking rather embarrassed at being caught off guard. “The place is swarming with cops!” The private investigator shook his head wryly and began undoing Jupiter's bindings.

“How long were you on to Mr. Bly?” Pete asked the private investigator. He nodded his head at Oscar Cutter. “Captain Cutter thought you were a thug from the New Pirates!”

“He wasn't investigating Connie Bly,” Jupe pronounced suddenly.

For a moment there was utter silence in the Captain's quarters as everyone, including Seth Cooley, stared at Jupiter in surprise.

“He wasn't?” Uncle Atticus blinked in confusion. “Then who,

boy?”

Jupiter nodded at the detective. “It may be against Mr. Cooley’s ethics to name his client, but I would surmise he was hired by the university. You see, Captain Cutter is the real criminal. I’m sure if you search this ship, or maybe his apartment on Lyndale Lane, you’ll find your Bronze Claw – and Bob too!”

Cutter’s face twisted into a mask of rage. “I can’t believe my ears!” he exploded. “I’m sitting here tied up, a captive, and yet I’m being accused?” The diver glared at Jupiter. “Young man, I would think twice before you so casually throw about your accusations! I’ve been a friend of your uncle’s for a very long time – now I demand you undo these ropes and...”

“The kid is right,” Cooley interrupted, his voice casual. “I don’t know how he figured it, but he’s right.” Cooley tucked his pistol away into a holster hidden beneath his jacket, then undid Pete and Atticus’s ropes. When they were all untied, they stood looking down at Oscar Cutter.

Cutter looked to Juve’s uncle. “Atticus – you can’t believe him! W-why it’s absurd! Quick, undo these ropes so we can catch Bly!”

Just then Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda rushed into the cabin followed by several police officers. They looked at Oscar Cutter in his bindings, then at Jupiter.

“Help! Police!” Cutter wailed. “These lunatics... Undo these ropes immediately – but watch them – they’re crazy I tell you!”

The officer in charge looked uncertainly at Seth Cooley.

“I’m Captain Blake. Are you the one who called?” The cop took one look at the scene and then took off his cap to scratch his head. “You want to explain what’s going on here?”

“Why is Captain Cutter tied up, Jupiter Jones?” Aunt Mathilda demanded.

“Did you find Bob?” Uncle Titus asked before Jupiter could open his mouth to answer the first question.

Jupiter turned to Cutter. “Would you like to tell us where we can find our partner and the Bronze Claw? Or will we be forced to search the ship?”

Perspiration dripped down Cutter’s nose. “Search the ship!” he shrugged. “Search my apartment. I’ve nothing to hide. I don’t know what you’re talking about! I was tied up by Connie Bly just as you were. You’ll see no one else is on board and that I’m innocent. By all means, search!”

Captain Blake barked orders at his men. “Search the ship from top to bottom.” When the three policemen had left, the officer turned to Seth Cooley. “You better start explaining just what in blue blazes is going on here!”

Jupiter stood up tall and smiled cunningly at Oscar Cutter. “I was thinking about something Captain Cutter just said. He claims he was tied up by Connie Bly.” Jupiter shook his head dramatically. “Actually, Captain, the ropes on your wrists and ankles are what gave you away!”

Everyone in the Captain’s quarters looked at the bindings on Cutter.

“What do you mean, First?” asked Pete. “He was tied up when we got here.”

“Precisely,” said Jupiter. “And if you’ll recall, Bly had me tie up Uncle Atticus and yourself, and then he proceeded to bind me. It was at that moment I noticed the knots.”

“The knots?” Aunt Mathilda echoed. “Stop being so dramatic, Jupiter Jones, and tell us what in heaven’s name you saw!”

Jupiter ignored the interruption. “If Bly really did tie up Mr. Cutter, then the knots on his ropes would most likely have been the same knots as on my ropes. But they weren’t! Bly tied my

ropes with common, everyday knots that we all know how to tie. But when I observed Mr. Cutter's ropes, I saw that his hands were tied just like mine, but the ropes on his *feet* were bound using an anchorbend knot. An anchorbend, as Uncle Atticus can attest, is a knot often used by sailors and divers.

"I began to wonder why Bly would bother to tie the Captain's feet one way, but his wrists another? The answer is – he didn't! Cutter tied his own feet, most likely when he saw Pete and I pull up with Uncle Atticus in his truck. He then had Bly tie his wrists to make us think that Bly had captured him and stowed him away in here!"

"But why, Jupiter?" Atticus demanded. "Why the charade? Quite frankly, I still find it very hard to believe!"

Oscar Cutter nodded his head vigorously. "You see, officer! It's outrageous. Bly is the one you want! You're in charge here – untie me!"

Throughout this exchange, Seth Cooley stood silently by the door. Jupiter looked at the private investigator. "You confused us when my partners caught you on my uncle's boat. We assumed that you were the thief. I think I can guess what you were doing."

Jupiter took a deep breath before he continued. "While investigating Captain Cutter, you followed either him or Bly to my uncle's where one of them broke into the house or the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, or both. The house was empty and you had no reason to think anyone would be home soon. But Pete and Bob caught you by surprise. Instead of simply explaining that you were an investigator, you tried to hide out on the boat until my friends left the dock. However, you knocked something over and gave yourself away."

Seth Cooley nodded in admiration at Juve. "That's just how it happened. I followed Bly to your uncle's house. Cutter was hav-

ing Bly do all his dirty work.”

Everyone looked at Oscar Cutter. The salvager looked defiant. “I’m not saying a word until I speak to my lawyer. And then there’ll be trouble for all of you!”

“I don’t get it,” said Pete. “Why was Cutter working with one of the New Pirates? I thought they were enemies.”

“I think I can answer that too,” Jupiter said triumphantly. “Remember all the racing forms at the apartment on Lyndale Lane? I deduce that Captain Cutter is a gambler. He likes to bet on horse races and dog races. In fact, he likes to bet so much that he lost all his money at the track. But rather than stop there, he bet all of the grant money he had been given by the university in Portland to fund his excavation!”

Seth Cooley was nodding his head in agreement. “And that still wasn’t enough,” the detective added. “From what I’ve seen, Cutter most likely suffers from an addiction in which he can’t stop himself from gambling, even when he has no money left to bet. The only logical conclusion is that he borrowed money from a loanshark or his bookie in a vain attempt to win back all the money he had lost.”

Oscar Cutter sat in the corner looking miserable.

“What’s a bookie?” asked Pete.

“A bookie,” explained Cooley, “is a person who determines the odds of a certain race, and then receives and pays off bets on that race.” The investigator looked at Jupiter. “That’s just how I figured it, kid. When Cutter couldn’t pay back the money, a bookie sent a thug like Connie Bly to make him come up with the money.”

Jupiter nodded. “So Cutter hatched a plan. He’d use the next grant check he got from the university to pay back the bookie. But – there were a couple of snags. One: The university wouldn’t fund

his excavation without tangible proof that there's enough sunken treasure to keep the dive going. And two: he had to stop diving when the Dutch Flute exhibit pulled in. No diving meant no money. When the Dutch Flute sailed out Cutter could commence diving and receive more grant money. When he got the check, he would give the money to Bly, and then leave town with the Bronze Claw."

"I get it!" exclaimed Pete. "It sounds like Captain Cutter had as much luck as a salvager as he did a gambler! The university probably threatened to stop the excavation unless he could come up with some good pirate artifacts. So he had Bly break into your uncle's house to steal lead shot and cannonballs and guns – and later planted them at his excavation site and then pretended to find them as if they were his own!"

"One thing I can't figure," said Cooley, "is why Bly joined up with those New Pirates of the West. That seemed pretty out of character for a thug like him."

"I wondered that too," Jupiter confessed. "My guess is, Cutter probably felt terrible about stealing from my uncle. So when he heard of a new pirate museum opening soon at the old fire station, it seemed like the answer to all his problems. I'll bet he told Bly to join the New Pirates to steal some artifacts and then toss them into the water at his salvage site, explaining that the sooner he found something, the sooner Bly would get his money. What Cutter didn't know was that all the artifacts at the New Pirate museum were fakes – exact replicas of the real thing!"

Jupiter took a breath and began pacing. "Bly wouldn't know the difference between an old and new blunderbuss. The wooden handles of a real blunderbuss would have rotted away years ago, and the metal would have been green and covered in barnacles. When Cutter began finding guns and knives that were still shiny

and new, he realized his mistake!”

“That’s probably why he had to hide Records,” Pete exclaimed. “Bob must have seen something when he was staking out Cutter earlier today. I’ll bet Cutter hid Bob in another room because he knows the truth!”

Aunt Mathilda bent down and picked up the blunderbuss Bly had dropped earlier. She looked at the handle and read aloud: “Property of the New Pirates of the West.” She looked sternly at Oscar Cutter and wagged a finger at the diver. “You should be ashamed of yourself!”

17

But Where's Bob?

“WAS THAT why Cutter had to steal from Atticus again?” guessed Uncle Titus.

Jupiter looked superior. He relished being able to explain things so neatly. “Correct. But Oscar Cutter’s string of bad luck continued. When he sent Bly back to Uncle Atticus’s to steal another artifact, Bly unwittingly took the Bronze Claw – having no idea that it was the find of a lifetime! Cutter didn’t recognize it either. That’s why he looked so shocked that first morning when Uncle Atticus told him what it really was!”

“So that’s why the Bronze Claw was brought back!” cried Pete. Jupiter nodded his head in agreement and pinched his lip for a moment. “Captain Cutter knew he couldn’t pass off the Bronze Claw as his own find – the publicity would have surely gotten back to Uncle Atticus. And he knew he couldn’t sell it quickly for some fast cash. The Claw would be useless to him. No, Cutter needed pirate artifacts that wouldn’t attract attention, like lead shot or a blunderbuss. So he had Bly return the Bronze Claw and steal something else.

“That’s when I began to suspect Cutter. I wondered who would benefit from stealing the claw, only to return it later. I deduced that once Cutter had planned to pay off his gambling debts with the university grant money, he decided there was no turning back and he wanted the Bronze Claw after all – perhaps to sell on the black market or to a private collector to help fund his getaway. That’s why he broke into my uncle’s house and stole it for the second time.”

“There’s something that’s been bugging me, First,” said Pete.

“I was wondering just what did Gaspar St. Vincent have to do with all this? And who is the H. KANE fellow on Lyndale Lane?”

“I think Gaspar was just what he appeared to be – a staunch, if somewhat overzealous, New Pirate. He most likely discovered that Bly had been stealing from the museum and went to confront him. Since Bly had been staying with Cutter at his apartment to make sure he didn’t try to run off without paying his debts, Bly probably gave the address on Lyndale Lane as his own when he signed up with the New Pirates. Gaspar really drove to the apartment to confront Bly. When Mr. Cooley saw him ringing furiously on the intercom, he went over to question him, assuming he was either a friend of Cutter’s or Bly’s.”

“Right again,” the investigator concurred. “I had been watching those apartments for some time and I new that Bly had been living with Cutter to make sure he didn’t flee. The name tag on the buzzer, H. KANE, was simply the name of the resident who lived there previously. It had never been changed when the university rented Cutter the apartment so he would have a place to stay while he was diving.”

A police officer entered the room and spoke in a low voice to Captain Blake. Blake turned and looked at Oscar Cutter. “I’m afraid it’s not looking very good for you my friend,” he said grimly. “There’s a small white hatchback parked out front with this claw thing everyone has been talking about stashed in the back. And there’s also some question marks drawn in green chalk.”

“That’s Bob!” Jupiter shouted. “That proves he was taken in Cutter’s car!”

Pete looked confused. “But that’s Bly’s car,” he said. “Bob and I saw him in a small white hatchback that first day at the old fire station.”

Jupiter looked incredulously at his partner and smacked his

forehead with the palm of his hand. "What? Why didn't you tell me that before, Second? Bly and Cutter have been sharing the same car this whole time?"

Pete looked indignant. "We didn't know it was important what kind of car he was driving. Besides, you didn't ask!"

Jupiter gave in reluctantly. "I suppose you're right. A good investigator should know that even the most insignificant of details are usually the most important."

Aunt Mathilda was still glowering down at Oscar Cutter. "What's important now is that we find Bob," she said firmly. "If Jupiter's right, he must be on this ship or at the apartment."

Atticus agreed. "Let's search the ship again." He turned to the flustered policeman and pointed down at Cutter. "Officer, perhaps you could radio one of your men to search this man's apartment."

"Not without a warrant," Captain Blake said seriously.

"That could take some time." He turned to look at Cutter. "Unless, of course, we have your permission."

Oscar Cutter looked pleadingly at Blake. "B-B-Bly stole my car... he-he planted the claw there. You've got to believe me! Search the ship. Search my apartment. When you don't find the boy you'll see that I'm innocent!"

Captain Blake ordered one of his men to search Cutter's apartment on Lyndale Lane and radio back the results. "Okay," he shouted to get everyone's attention, "spread out and search this ship again from top to bottom. I want every last inch of this thing covered!"

An hour later the entire vessel had been combed over without a trace of Bob to be found. The search party sat glumly in the captain's quarters when another policeman came into the room.

"Have you found him?" Aunt Mathilda demanded, jumping up from her seat. "Is Bob at the apartment?"

Officer Blake shook his head grimly. “I’m afraid there’s no sign of him, boys. I hate to say it, but if we can’t find your friend, we’ll have to let Captain Cutter go.” The policeman began undoing Cutter’s bindings. “There’s just not enough evidence to hold him. Connie Bly has a record as long as my arm – it looks like he was behind it all.”

Oscar Cutter looked vindicated. “Just wait until I see my lawyer!” the handsome diver roared. He turned an evil eye at Atticus. “Some friend!” he sneered. “Stabbing a good friend in the back. I told you I had nothing to do with any of this! Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to assess the damage that loose cannon Cooley did to the captain’s quarters when he endangered us all with his pistol.”

Aunt Mathilda looked worried and Uncle Titus tried to soothe her as the search party headed for the top deck. The temperature had dropped considerably and the boys’ teeth chattered. The fog had grown thick and wispy and seemed to have a life of its own as it crawled up their legs.

Pete looked helplessly at Jupiter.

“Where could he be, First?”

Jupiter scowled and tried to keep from shivering. He was certain there was something he was missing. Some important clue that he had overlooked – if only he could remember!

Pete could almost hear the gears spinning in his friend’s head as Jupiter thought furiously.

Atticus put an arm around his nephew. “Perhaps Robert is back home by now, Jupiter. Yes, I’ll bet that’s just where he is. He probably got tired of waiting around for us to return and is fast asleep on the Queen Anne’s Revenge. Why, I’ll bet...”

“That’s it!” Jupiter cried.

The search party was half-way down the gangplank. They all

stopped and stared at Jupiter.

“What’s it?” demanded Atticus.

Jupiter’s round face was wide-eyed. He smiled at his uncle.

“You just provided the most vital clue of the mystery!”

Seth Cooley and the rest looked hopefully at Jupiter.

“You’ve thought of something, kid?”

“You know where he is!” Pete cried.

“Possibly,” Jupe said. “I have a theory...”

“Thunderation, boy!” Aunt Mathilda squawked, “your flair for the dramatic is too much. Spit it out if you know!”

The color seemed to drain from Oscar Cutter’s face. He waved his arms frantically and forbid them to come back aboard.

“Officer’s – this is really too much! This vessel sails out tomorrow morning. I’ve really got too much work to do without this impudent rascal playing cat and mouse. I’m afraid I must insist that everyone clear the deck.” He turned and seethed at Jupiter. “Young man, everyone is quite tired of your games. You have proved yourself to be intelligent far beyond your years, but really, enough is enough!”

“You’re just stalling!” Pete said hotly. “If Bob sails out with the boat, you’ll be free and clear to collect the grant money!”

The diver strode menacingly toward Pete and looked as if he might strike out. Titus and Atticus Jones stepped up to Pete’s side.

“Let us search the boat once more,” Atticus demanded. “If we don’t find Bob, we’ll leave quietly and no harm will be done.”

Cooley and Captain Blake came back up the gangplank and stood on either side of Jupiter.

“Okay, kid,” said Blake, “where do you think your friend is?”

Jupiter grinned. “When my Uncle Atticus mentioned the name *Queen Anne’s Revenge*, that made me think of William Teach – also known as Blackbeard! Remember, Blackbeard was a vil-

lianous pirate who looted and smuggled all kinds of treasure. I deduce that if this Dutch Flute is really as authentic as Captain Cutter claims it to be, then surely there must be some hidden compartments we've overlooked!"

Cooley looked at Jupiter with admiration. "Of course! I should have thought of that myself!"

Captain Blake called his men back onto the ship's deck. "We'll search the ship again. Look for anything that might be a secret room or compartment!"

Oscar Cutter sputtered and raged. Captain Blake gave him a stern look and ordered one of his men to remain with the diver. "I don't want you going anywhere. You'll have a lot of explaining to do if the boy is found!"

The group disappeared below deck and spread out. Within fifteen minutes Pete let out a triumphant holler. His sharp eyes had caught something in the narrow hall that he never would have seen if he didn't know what he was looking for.

"Look!" he cried pointing to the floor. "I must have walked across this corridor a dozen times and never noticed it!"

The anxious searchers crowded into the cramped hallway and peered at the floor.

"What is it, Pete?" Jupiter cried. The stocky boy studied the floor where Pete was kneeling. Understanding suddenly washed over his face. "Of course! The floorboards don't match! See how the wood has been replaced in this section? The color and grain are slightly darker. I never noticed it before!"

Pete and Jupiter quickly pulled out their prized Swiss Army knives and slid the blades into the tight cracks. They applied pressure and the large section of planks sudden moved up an inch.

Jupiter wedged his fingers into the crack. With one swift movement, the five-foot section of floor came up with a squeal



and there lie Bob Andrews with tape over his mouth.

The small boy sat up and quickly and tore the tape off.

“It’s about time!” he gasped. “I thought you’d never find me!”

Jupiter and Pete helped their friend out of the secret compartment.

“Did you catch Cutter?” the small boy asked. “He’s working with Bly and they’re both stealing from your uncle and the New Pirates! They’re the ones who put me in there.”

The smallest of The Three Investigators dug into his front pockets and pulled out several small scraps of paper. “I found these in the back of Bly’s car!” he said, handing them to Jupiter.

The First Investigator examined the scraps of paper.

“These are stubs from racing tickets. And notices for overdue credit card payments. Looks like my theory on Oscar Cutter was correct!”

“Bly told Captain Cutter that I knew he was involved,” Bob continued. “Cutter realized he had to keep me quiet until everyone had gone!”

Jupiter grinned at his partner as they headed up to the top deck and into the swirling fog. “We know all about it, Records. The Man in Black, I mean Seth Cooley, figured it out too.”

At the mention of his name, Cooley walked over and introduced himself to Bob. “I’m glad you’re okay, son. You three sure make a swell team. If I’m ever stumped in one of my investigations, I’ll be sure to give The Three Investigators a call!”

Jupiter, swelling with pride when he heard this, exchanged business cards with Cooley.

Atticus Jones beamed with pride and vigorously shook each of the boys’ hands. “Outstanding work, lads! Simply outstanding!” he crowed. “Titus ... Mathilda... Jupiter is a credit to the Jones name, wouldn’t you agree?”

Titus grinned merrily and threw an arm around his nephew.

Mathilda rolled her eyes, then laughed heartily. “I still say he should mind his own business. But I guess he does have a knack for solving puzzles.”

Jupiter’s stomach rumbled as if in agreement. “Now let’s confront Oscar Cutter and get a confession out of him so we can go home and finally have that lobster dinner!” he laughed.

18

John Crowe Speaking

THERE MAY be a couple of points concerning *The Adventure of the Bronze Claw* which you might be wondering about, so I will try to put your mind at ease.

Oscar Cutter did, indeed, confess to the whole nefarious plot. Just as Jupiter had deduced, the unlucky diver was hopelessly in debt, having gambled away every last cent. If he could have kept Bob hidden away for a few more hours, he might have gotten away scott free! Thankfully, Jupiter's intuition saved his friend and neatly wrapped up the mystery.

Connie Bly refused to talk, save to say that Cutter was behind it all. As the evidence against Bly was not as concrete as that against Cutter, he received a less harsh sentence, and is currently doing a two year stretch for kidnapping and assault charges in an Oregon penitentiary.

Chief Reynolds called back a couple of days later with the information on the license plate number: DLH 555. Of course this belonged to the detective, Seth Cooley. Jupiter informed the chief that they had already cracked the case, but said he wouldn't hesitate to call back if they needed any other information. The chief hung up on Jupiter.

Atticus Jones took all the extra hands in his house and set them to work moving all his salvage and treasure into his new maritime antique store in downtown Anchor Bay. The Grand Opening was moved up so The Three Investigators could officially cut the ribbon before they headed back to Rocky Beach. They even got their picture in the local newspaper along with a brief story about their help in solving the case. Needless to say, a state-

of-the-art alarm system was installed in the antique store to dissuade any potential thieves.

I'm happy to inform you that the boys did get to eat all the lobster they could stand, and Pete even found time to go on several dives with Atticus. Although no treasure was found, Pete did discover a few cannonballs and a handful of lead shot, which was treasure enough for the young lad I suppose.

As for the Bronze Claw itself, well, it remains a mystery to this day. Atticus Jones could find no other evidence to substantiate his claim that it came from the bowsprit of Blackbeard's ship, although the university in Portland expressed great interest in the piece and has asked to purchase it from the younger Jones brother at a hefty price. It appears that the lost treasure of Blackbeard's booty will remain one of the great enigmas in all of history.

I must admit that I was much easier on the boys when they met with me to discuss the case than Mr. Hitchcock might have been. Jupiter kicked himself when I pointed out a clue early on in the mystery that he missed! He might have been suspicious of Oscar Cutter from the start if he had paid more attention to his little white car.

Remember, only Atticus's battered red pickup was in the driveway when they first arrived – but an out-of-breath Cutter drove off in his car when he left that morning. How could Cutter have been short of breath from running after the supposed thief if he had been driving his car? The answer is: He didn't chase a thief at all!

One thing is quite certain: The Three Investigators will undoubtedly find another mystery to solve, and when they do, you can bet the results will be thrilling. That's one bet even Oscar Cutter could win!

JOHN CROWE

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