

The Three Investigators

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The Secret of The Three Impostors



Mark Zahn

The Three Investigators in

The Secret of the
**Three
Impostors**

by Mark Zahn

Based on characters created by Robert Arthur

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Presented by: www.threeinvestigatorsbooks.com

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A Few Words From John Crowe

GREETINGS MYSTERY LOVERS! It is an immense honor to introduce this thrilling adventure of those insufferably clever young lads from Rocky Beach, California: The Three Investigators! If you have already made their acquaintance, then you have my full permission to skip this formality and proceed directly to the main feature. If, however, this is your first time in Rocky Beach, then an introduction is in order.

The firm's First Investigator and chief instigator is the stocky, but astutely observant, Jupiter Jones. Orphaned as a small child and living with his aunt and uncle, Jupiter, a former child actor tagged with the unfortunate stage name of Baby Fatso, has developed a deep aversion to being called fat. From the time he began reading, Jupiter devoured every book he could get his hands on – from psychology to criminology. The result being a point of annoyance for most adults who feel he knows too much for his own good.

Pete Crenshaw is the most athletic of the trio. His sturdy frame and keen sense of direction have made him invaluable in all of the cases the boys have tackled. While Pete may be a reluctant participant to Jupiter's endeavors, he has always remained loyal and true to his friends.

Last, but by no means least, is the studious yet courageous Bob Andrews. In charge of all record keeping and research for this lively team, Bob has helped the firm outwit the most clever of crooks by proving he is not only meticulous in his notation, but has the heart of a lion in times of duress.

Enough with the introductions! The game is afoot!

JOHN CROWE

1

A Surprising Visitor

“I WONDER what would happen if I endeavored upon a life of crime,” Jupiter Jones speculated to himself. It was a hot day and he and Pete Crenshaw were sitting in the shade of Jupiter’s outdoor workshop, tinkering with a fresh supply of junk recently purchased by Jupiter’s Uncle Titus.

Pete, the tall and muscular Second Investigator, dropped the screwdriver he was using to pry the back off an old clock. He looked at Jupiter with an open mouth.

“What did you say?”

“I said, I wonder what would happen if I ventured upon a criminal enterprise,” Jupiter repeated. “You recall when we foiled the scheme of the bank robbers who used midgets disguised as gnomes? The ringleader of that outfit offered to take me under his wing and train me to be a master criminal. I was just pondering what would have happened if I had accepted his offer.”

“You’d probably be locked up in the Los Angeles County Prison with the rest of that gang,” Pete said dryly.

“Hmm,” Jupiter murmured, “I wonder.”

The boys were in good spirits since they had learned they were being honored by the Rocky Beach Rotary Club as outstanding citizens for their community service as volunteer junior detectives. They were to share half of a five thousand dollar prize with another Rocky Beach local – Leo Magellan, a brash man of about sixty who loved the arts and hated kids.

There was going to be a banquet in the Town Hall with their

friend, Chief Reynolds, acting as master of ceremonies. Their share of the money split three ways meant over a thousand dollars apiece.

“It stands to reason that a master criminal would have to achieve a master caper. One that was well planned and perfectly executed,” Jupiter continued, thinking out loud.

“You’re not really thinking about becoming a thief are you?” Pete exclaimed.

“I suppose not,” Jupiter grinned. “But a erudite investigator should put him or herself into the mind of their adversary on occasion, if only to gain a fresh perspective on the criminal mind.”

“If I had a nickel for every time I’ve heard you say that...” Pete trailed off as he saw Bob Andrews, the third member of their detective team, approaching the workshop.

“Hello, Records. What kept you?”

“You’ll never guess who I ran into at the library,” Bob said excitedly. Bob worked part-time at the Rocky Beach Public Library. His job helped him stay on top of all research needed when The Three Investigators were on a case.

Jupiter rubbed his chin as if thinking hard.

“While my skill at deduction is keen, I’m afraid the population of Rocky Beach is far too large to accurately determine who you encountered at the library.”

“He means you’re going to have to tell us,” Pete said dryly.

“Leo Magellan!” Bob said with wide eyes.

Pete whistled. “That old crank we’re sharing the prize money with? Too bad for you – he hates kids!”

“Tell me about it,” Bob agreed. “He cornered me and gave me a lecture about how he was cheated out of his full share of the prize money. He thinks *he* should have it all!”

“I feel sorry for him,” Jupiter said. “His hostility toward others is a clear indication of his loneliness. I guess he feels better when he’s bossing others around.”

“I just hope I never run into him,” Pete shrugged. “He may have contributed a lot to the community, but he’s made life miserable for kids in this town for ages. I don’t think he deserves the prize money he’s getting.”

“Speaking of prize money, have you decided what you’re going to do with your share of it?” Bob asked excitedly.

“I’m going to blow it all at Magic Mountain!” Pete laughed.

“I thought about a new bicycle. How about you Jupe?”

“It is my contention that our firm could better utilize our financial windfall by investing in a computer,” Jupiter replied. “At least a down-payment on one.”

“Boy, leave it to Jupiter Jones to take all the fun out of winning a lot of money!” Pete said sarcastically.

The boys continued to talk enthusiastically about how they might spend their prize, until, over the mounds of strategically placed junk, they heard Jupe’s Aunt Mathilda calling loudly for them.

Mrs. Jones was a robust woman who was endlessly good natured. Her gracious heart was topped only by her ability to find lazy boys and put them to work in the salvage yard – something she excelled at. Although Titus went on the buying trips, it was really Jupe’s Aunt Mathilda that ran the yard, and now her voice commanded attention.

“Jupiter!” she yelled. “Heavens to Betsy, where have you gotten off to now? You have a visitor. Chief Reynolds is here to see you!” With that she bustled off to tend to some chores which would occupy her and yet keep her within ear-shot of the conver-

sation.

The three lads exchanged surprised glances. “Do you suppose he forgot to tell us something about the banquet?” Bob asked, hopping down from the printing press.

“There’s only one way to ascertain the answer,” Jupiter said over his shoulder. “Let’s go!”

The three boys zig-zagged through the junk toward the big iron gates which opened up into the Jones Salvage Yard. Waiting there beside his patrol car was Chief Reynolds. Jupiter was instantly aware that the chief had a pinched look to his face. They had worked with him enough times for Jupe to deduce the friendly officer was under considerable stress when he had that look.

“Hello, Chief. I see you’re here on business, and not to talk about the upcoming banquet,” Jupiter said casually.

“Why, that’s exactly right, Jupiter. But how you guessed is beyond me!” Chief Reynolds replied with raised eyebrows. Bob and Pete looked at Jupiter with equal amazement.

“I try to refrain from guessing when the answer is elementary. How can we help you?”

“Well boys,” the chief said, shuffling his feet a bit, as if he were embarrassed, “there was a break-in at Pearl’s Bakery last night.” he explained.

“And you want our help to solve the crime, right?” Pete said anxiously. It had been several weeks since the boy’s last case, and they were eager for a mystery to solve.

“I’m afraid not, Pete,” the chief answered slowly. “You see – you three are the prime suspects!”

“What?” they cried in unison.

Aunt Mathilda dropped the broom she was holding and stormed over. “What’s the meaning of this, Sam?” She demand-

ed. “You know these boys better than that!” With a huff, she turned on her heel, hollering toward the small office. “Titus Andronicus Jones, come out here, quick!”

“Now just relax, Mathilda,” the chief reassured her. “I’m sure there’s just been a mistake.”

As the chief was trying to calm Jupiter’s aunt, Titus Jones came strolling up to the front gate. Mr. Jones was a short man with a big nose and even bigger mustache. His eyes twinkled as he tugged on the pipe protruding from his lips. “What’s all the fuss, Sam?” He asked calmly.

“Hello, Titus. Now, I’m sure there’s a completely rational explanation for all this – I’m just reporting the facts as I know them. You see, Pearl’s Bakery was broken into last night,” the chief said again. “We don’t have any clues – except this.”

He held up one of the boys oversized business cards, encased in a protective plastic evidence bag.

“Why, that’s a card from the boys’ club!” Mrs. Jones gasped. Mathilda Jones was vaguely aware that the boys held regular meetings, but the fact that they were serious investigators who had helped provide solutions to a number of real crimes, eluded her. No matter how much Juve reminded her, she still called their enterprise a club.

Meanwhile, Jupiter was studying the card in the chief’s hand and tugging on his lower lip – a sure sign that his mental machinery was spinning in high gear.

“May I see that, sir?” he asked.

The chief handed over the evidence bag with the card in it. Jupiter examined it minutely. He turned it over and looked at the back, then again at the front. Bob and Pete crowded close and looked over his shoulder. It read:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

“We Investigate Anything”

???

First Investigator.....Jupiter Jones

Second Investigator.....Peter Crenshaw

Records & Research.....Bob Andrews

“Gleeps! A thief dropped our card!” Pete exclaimed.

“You said this was found at the scene of the crime?” Jupiter asked with a frown.

“That’s right, Jupiter,” answered the chief. “Right next to the empty cash register. Pearl – that is, Mrs. Henderson, the owner – had just installed a complex security system only two weeks ago. She said she often baked late into the night and many nights worked there alone. It took some real ingenuity by the thief to bypass the system. Now Pearl is beside herself with worry.”

“The thief only took money from the cash register?” Jupiter inquired, somewhat surprised. “Nothing else was stolen or vandalized?”

“That’s the funny part,” the chief said with a perplexed expression about his face. The day seemed to be growing increasingly hotter. The chief pulled loose his tie and opened his collar. “Pearl says no equipment was disturbed, and not even a single donut was taken. And she is certain the cash register only contained twenty dollars!”

2

Framed

“IT APPEARS to me the thief made an obvious attempt to frame us for the crime,” Jupiter stated matter-of-factly.

“It would seem that way,” replied Chief Reynolds. “Still, much as I hate to do it, I’m going to have to ask you boys where you were around nine o’clock last night,” the chief said, pulling out a pen and small notepad.

Bob and Pete both looked at Jupiter. They all knew that at nine o’clock last night they were holding a secret meeting inside their headquarters. Headquarters was a thirty foot mobile home trailer that Titus Jones had bought in the hopes of salvaging – but since the frame had been so badly damaged, it had just sat in the yard until finally Titus had given it to Jupiter to use as a clubhouse for he and his friends. Slowly, over the course of several months, the boys had meticulously piled junk all around it, so that now it remained hidden – and forgotten – by all but the boys.

“The three of us were here in the salvage yard holding a meeting at nine o’clock last night, Chief,” Jupiter said without hesitation.

“Can anyone back that up?”

Being the confident and sometimes pompous leader of The Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones was not often flustered. Now he stammered an answer.

“W-well... No... I - I guess not, sir.”

The chief patted Juve on the shoulder and smiled.

“Don’t worry about it too much, son. You boys have been



excellent junior deputies. I doubt you would have been so care-less even if you did turn into criminals.”

Jupe, Pete and Bob tried to smile graciously at the chief’s praise.

“Well boys, I’ve got to get this business card back to the crime-lab so I can check it for fingerprints. I’ll let you know when I get the results back.” He climbed into his cruiser and gave them a kind-hearted salute as he backed out of the salvage yard. The boys waved goodbye and stood sullenly by the front gates as he drove off down the street.

Just as the chief’s cruiser disappeared from sight, a flashy blue sports car came skidding through the gates, kicking a spray of gravel and acrid dust into the hot summer air.

“Skinny Norris!” Pete said hotly. “I’m not in the mood for any of his tricks!”

E. Skinner Norris was a couple of years older than the boys, and, since his father was a legal resident of another state that gave out drivers licenses practically to infants, Skinny was able to drive a car – a point he lorded over all the kids in Rocky Beach.

But even though Skinny had a car, what he really liked doing while he lived in Rocky Beach was to horn in on whatever Jupiter, Pete and Bob were doing. He often tried to outsmart Jupe, but never succeeded. Now he leapt out of his car and leered at the investigators.

“Get lost, Skinny!” Bob seethed.

“Quiet, you!” Skinny grinned like a cat who has just caught a canary. “Well, Jupiter McSherlock, I guess you’re in pretty hot water now, huh?” A couple of Skinny’s cronies in the back seat of his car snorted laughter, and Skinny let out a bray that sounded like a horse whinnying.

Jupe's face took on a surprised look. "I don't know what you mean, Skinny," he said innocently, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh, come on!" the lanky youth blustered, waving his arms wildly, "everyone in town knows you did it! They found your business card at the scene of the crime!" he sneered maliciously.

"That's a very interesting piece of information, Skinny," Jupiter said, giving a quick wink to Bob and Pete. "Considering only Mrs. Henderson and the police are aware of the details of the crime, perhaps you would be willing to relate how you deduced that our business card was found upon the premises."

Skinny's face became flushed. "You think you're so smart, Fatso! You just wait!" he pointed a bony finger at Jupe. "By the end of the day you three will be the laughing stock of Rocky Beach!"

Skinny leapt back into his car and backed out recklessly, creating another plume of dust. Laughing and sticking his tongue out at the boys, he roared off down the street.

When the dust had settled, Bob asked the question they were all thinking.

"How did Skinny know about the card, Jupe?"

Jupiter rocked back on his heels – his brow furrowed. "I'm not sure, but it appears his big mouth may have just implicated him in the burglary of Pearl's Bakery. I think it's time The Three Investigators held an emergency meeting!"

"I now call this meeting to order," Jupiter said, rapping his knuckles on the fire-scarred desk which sat inside headquarters. "Since we are all aware of the perplexing events which have recently been reported to us, I move we begin deliberating on potential suspects."

“What did he say?” Pete asked Bob.

“He said we all heard the same thing, so lets try to figure out who’s got it in for us,” Bob explained.

“Oh – why didn’t he just say so?”

The stocky First Investigator cleared his throat and rested his elbows on the table. “If you two are through with the comedy act, we shall proceed,” he said impatiently. “Skinny Norris is already on the list for obvious reasons. Can either of you think of anyone else who may want to smear our good name and reputation?”

“Golly, Jupe. We’ve solved so many cases – it could be any of a hundred people!” Pete exclaimed.

“Well, a hundred might be a slight exaggeration, but we certainly have made several enemies,” Jupe sighed.

“Do you think it could be Hugenay?” Bob asked excitedly, “the French art thief we ran into on the stuttering parrot case, and again when we solved the case of the screaming clock?”

Jupiter leaned back in the swivel office chair that he had refurbished – a look of deep concentration on his round face. “Not his style,” he decided. “Besides, he actually helped us the last time we met. I don’t think he would come all the way back to Rocky Beach just to get us into trouble. Next?”

Pete snapped his fingers. “How about those crooks who were after August August’s jewel, the Fiery Eye? The police never did catch them!”

“Hmm... definitely a possibility,” Jupiter replied.

They all sat in silence for a long time, pondering all the sinister agents they had run up against in their career as The Three Investigators. Finally Bob threw up his hands in exasperation.

“Oh, let’s face it fellows, the list could go on and on!” He said dejectedly.

“You’re right, Records. Let us continue,” Jupiter agreed. “Now why would a crook intentionally choose a bakery to rob? That’s the real mystery here.”

“I’ll take a double helping of that!” Pete said. “Why anyone would go to all that trouble for twenty dollars is a real skull-buster!”

“Awk! Skullbuster! Awk!” Squawked Blackbeard from his perch in the large cage hanging in the corner. Blackbeard was a pet myna bird they had acquired on a previous case – his main goal in life seemed to be getting on Pete’s nerves.

“Pipe down, you!” Pete snorted.

“Jupe, what do you say we call it a night?” Bob sighed. “It’s been a long day, and my stomach says it’s almost dinnertime.”

“I suppose you’re right, Bob,” Jupiter said with resignation. “Tonight, we’ll all try to think of who could be trying to frame us for this crime. Tomorrow, I’d like you to go through all of our case files, Records. Make a list of all potential suspects, including Skinny, although I doubt he’s our man.”

“Okay, Jupe,” said Bob. The small boy disappeared down Tunnel Two, a trap door in the floor of the trailer that served as one of several secret entrances in and out of headquarters.

“Second, tomorrow you’ll tail Skinny and see what he’s up to. Report back here at noon.”

“I have to mow my neighbor’s lawn first, but then I’ll be watching that goop like a hawk!” said Pete. “What are you doing tomorrow, First?”

“Tomorrow,” said Jupe dramatically, “I have a date with four very rusty lawn chairs.”

Jupiter waved goodbye to his pals as he locked up the salvage yard, then walked across the street to the small white cottage that

served as the Jones's home.

Pete and Bob bicycled toward home. The two friends rode together for part of the way, talking of the surprising events of the day. Then as the summer sun began to set in the purple sky, they split up and went their separate ways.

Neither boy noticed the nondescript black sedan that silently tailed them.

3

Another Break-In

PETE CRENSHAW had awakened early that morning and battled the thick California fog so he could get his neighbor's lawn mowed. He wasn't looking forward to shadowing Skinny Norris and his car all over Rocky Beach on his bicycle. But Pete was the most athletic of the three boys, so he was used to this type of investigative work.

However, this morning Pete was in luck. Skinny's car remained in the driveway of his parent's lavish home all morning.

It was now noon, and from his vantage point in a large elm tree across the street, Pete, using his dad's binoculars, had only seen Skinny's freckled face peering nervously through the curtains from time to time. Pete thought he looked scared and he reminded himself to report this observation to Jupiter.

He put his binoculars in their protective case and clambered down from his perch.

The hot noon sun had burned away the remains of the morning fog as Pete wheeled into the Jones Salvage Yard.

Hans and Konrad, the yard's two big Barvarian helpers, had the hood of the salvage yard's small truck open and were peering inside.

"Hello, Konrad. Hello, Hans."

"Hi, Pete," said Konrad.

"You looking for Jupe?" asked Hans.

"He's not here?" Pete asked, surprised. "I thought he had to work all day!"

“Have not seen Jupe all morning,” Konrad shrugged. “Mrs. Jones – she is not too happy with this.”

“Okay. Thanks guys.”

“Hokey-doke, Pete,” the two blonde brothers said agreeably, returning to the truck’s engine.

Pete wheeled his bicycle around the piles of miscellaneous junk until he arrived at Jupe’s outdoor workshop. Bob’s bicycle was leaning against the old printing press Jupiter had restored.

The tall boy leaned his bike against Bob’s and crawled under the press. He deftly moved a piece of iron grillwork that appeared to be leaning against an old corrugated pipe and crawled in. This was the entrance to Tunnel Two. The pipe extended for several yards, going partially underground at one point. The boys had put scraps of carpet down to keep their knees from getting banged up. Pete arrived at a trap-door that opened up into the floor of headquarters, gave the secret knock, and entered.

Bob Andrews was working busily at the file cabinets.

With a pencil clamped between his teeth, he grunted a greeting to Pete.

“Have you seen Jupe?” Pete asked.

“Haven’t seen him all morning,” Bob mumbled.

“Golly, do you think...” Pete was interrupted by the ringing telephone. Both boys looked at each other for a moment. The telephone didn’t ring often, but when it did it was almost always something important. Bob let the pencil drop from between his teeth and answered in his most professional manner.

“The Three Investigators, Bob Andrews speaking.”

“Records!” It was Jupiter, and he sounded frantic. “Is Pete there?”

“He just got back. Where are you?”

“Put me on the loudspeaker!” Jupiter instructed.

The loudspeaker was a contraption Jupe had rigged up out of an old microphone and radio. When it was turned on, all three boys could hear any phone calls they might receive. Bob switched it on and held the phone up next to the microphone.

“Go ahead, First,” Bob said.

“Top emergency! Easy Three! Red Gate Rover! Green’s Hardware Store! Ramble and scramble! Watch your back!”

Jupiter suddenly hung up the phone. Bob and Pete stared at each other as if hypnotized by the dial-tone ringing in their ears.

“What was that all about?” Pete demanded.

“I’m not sure, but we better follow his instructions!” cried Bob. “Let’s go!”

Pete and Bob tumbled out through Easy Three. Easy Three consisted of a large door that was still in its frame which seemed to be resting haphazardly against a pile of worthless junk. When unlocked by a rusty key the boys kept hidden, it opened up into a large iron boiler, that, in turn, led directly into headquarters.

They stealthily retrieved their bicycles and made a bee-line for Red Gate Rover. Years ago, several Rocky Beach artists had painted the fence surrounding the salvage yard – it was their way of thanking Titus Jones for often giving them supplies and other odds and ends for free.

One mural on the back section of the fence depicted the great San Francisco fire. A small dog, whom the boys had nicknamed Rover, watched sadly as his dog house went up in flames. Jupiter devised a system that allowed three boards in the fence to swing up when a knot in Rover’s eye was pushed. The boys mainly used this entrance when they wanted to be extra cautious about not being seen by Aunt Mathilda.

Bob and Pete let Red Gate Rover swing shut and then began pedaling furiously along a worn path in the grass, heading for Rocky Beach's downtown shopping district.

"Do you suppose we're being watched?" Bob asked nervously between puffs for air.

"Maybe," said Pete, darkly. "We better keep our eyes open and make sure we're not being followed!"

The boys stuck to the back streets and alleyways, stealing glances over their shoulders for any cars that seemed to be following them. Within several minutes they were pulling their bikes up to Green's Hardware Store. Jupiter and Chief Reynolds stood out front. Jupe was pacing to and fro, pinching his bottom lip and looking as if he might wear out his brain from thinking so hard.

Chief Reynolds' expression looked grim.

"Hey Jupe, what's going on?" Pete asked, huffing and puffing.

"Did the hardware store get robbed?" Bob asked, pushing his glasses up on his sweaty nose.

Jupiter ignored the question and confronted Bob.

"Records, did you go straight home after leaving the salvage yard last night?"

"I sure did, Jupe. Say, what's this all about, anyways?" the small boy said, bewildered.

"Come inside, boys," Chief Reynolds said seriously, leading them through the front door. "You're right, Bob. Green's Hardware store was broken into and robbed last night. See for yourself, but remember, this is a crime scene. Don't touch anything!" he ordered.

The first thing the boys noticed was the long line of nylon rope in the middle of the room that descended from a small skylight in the high ceiling.

“You’ll notice the skylight is very small,” Jupiter said as the group approached the dangling rope. “Almost too small for a man – but just right for a boy.”

“I don’t like the sound of this!” Bob said under his breath.

“Next,” Jupiter continued as if lecturing a class, “we find at the base of the rope, shards of what appears to be green chalk.”

“Oh, no!” Bob moaned.

“And now, if I can direct your attention to the glass window of the skylight...” Jupiter instructed, pointing his finger toward the ceiling.

“A question mark!” Bob and Pete shouted together.

The boys could hardly believe their eyes. Chalked on the glass skylight thirty feet above their heads was a large green question mark – the special sign of The Three Investigators!

“Jupe... Chief... You’ve got to believe me!” Bob pleaded, his eyes wide. “I was sound asleep last night! At home. In b-b-bed... where I wish I was right now!”

4

Stakeout

A THICK FOG was rolling in off the Pacific later that night. The Three Investigators – each with their own gym bag of black clothes – rendezvoused at Headquarters several minutes before eight o'clock. Taking care not to be seen, they entered the hidden trailer through Door Four.

Once inside, there was a silent determination in the room. Each boy knew the stakes were high, and no one felt like making jokes. Pete and Bob checked the batteries in their flashlights and walkie-talkies while Jupiter busied himself by packing various items into a knapsack.

Pete eyed the bag skeptically. “What’s in the bag, Jupe?”

Jupiter, full of his usual self-importance, only grinned slightly and zipped the bag closed with an air of finality. “Surveillance essentials,” was all he would say.

Bob and Pete rolled their eyes. They both knew it was hopeless trying to pry information out of their brainy friend. They would have better luck trying to get Aunt Mathilda to take a vacation than they would squeezing information out of Jupiter Jones before he was ready to tell.

Once the boys had changed into their black ‘stakeout clothes,’ they took turns smearing their faces with shoe polish. Once they were disguised to Jupiter’s satisfaction, they snapped off the light and quietly made their way out through Tunnel Two, where their bicycles awaited them.

Taking care leaving the salvage yard, the three friends coast-



ed their bicycles along Rocky Beach's deserted steets. It was several minutes before eight o'clock, and the boys were taking a covert route down the back alleyways in order to arrive at the downtown shopping district unseen.

Jupiter had slung the knapsack of his "surveillance essentials" over his shoulder before leaving the salvage yard. Now he and Bob were talking eagerly about various stakeout techniques while Pete – who had a strong aversion towards anything even remotely dangerous – lagged behind.

"A stakeout..." Pete muttered. "Why can't we just let the professionals handle this? That's what we pay the police for!"

Jupiter had a natural acting ability that allowed him to transform his face and demeanor, providing the illusion that he was much older than he actually appeared. He now sat very erect on his bicycle and held his chin high.

"I have no doubt our local police force will be initiating their own surveillance tonight. But our keen young eyes see much that remains obscured to adults. It is essential that we commence with our own operation."

Pete sighed in exasperation. "Jupe, sometimes I think you know too much for your own good!"

"You're probably right, Second" Bob chuckled. "But just think how boring our life would be without him."

"Very funny, fellows," Jupe snorted, growing serious. "But we need to remember that Chief Reynolds' men have been under a lot of stress with all the criminal activity going on in Rocky Beach recently. And we know from experience that they don't like the idea of boys doing their job for them. So it's imperative that we remain unseen tonight."

The two boys nodded solemnly to this.

“What did Skinny have to say about the robberies, Jupe?” asked Bob. “Did the Chief ever talk to him?”

“I’m afraid not, Bob – Skinny has skipped town. His mother said he went to stay with a cousin in Seaside for a couple of weeks.”

“That sneak!” Pete seethed, smacking his fist. “Wait until I get my hands on him!”

“Actually, I’ve already eliminated Skinny as a suspect,” Jupiter informed them as they headed down a darkened alley, now just a block away from downtown. “This scheme is much too intricate for the likes of E. Skinner Norris. Besides, he would never have the guts to pull off a caper of this magnitude.”

“I’ll buy that,” Bob agreed. “Somehow Skinny stumbled upon the thief – or thief’s – plan, but more than likely that’s as far as it goes. We’ll find out as soon as the Chief tracks him down.”

Following Jupe’s lead, Bob and Pete eased their bicycles to a stop and chained them to a railing. Jupiter unstrapped the backpack from his bike and rummaged through it.

Pete’s curiosity finally got the better of him as he watched Jupe sling the backpack over his shoulder. Over the course of many investigations the Second Investigator had learned to expect the unexpected from Jupiter Jones.

“Okay, enough secrecy – what’s in the bag, Jones?”

Jupe grinned. “An assortment of supplies that may prove beneficial in assisting us with our surveillance.”

“What he meant to say was, he’s got things that will come in handy,” Bob interpreted with a sly grin.

“A mundane way of putting it, but essentially correct, Records,” Jupiter replied. He began handing out the contents of the bag. “Our walkie-talkies, which will keep us in contact up to

five city blocks away. Flashlights, spare pieces of chalk, three sets of binoculars, three bottles of orange soda, and some of Aunt Mathilda's world famous chocolate chip cookies! You never know how long a stakeout might last!" Jupe smiled, taking a king-sized bite.

"Boy, leave it to Jupe to come prepared!" Bob laughed.

Jupiter then became deadly serious.

"Have you both received permission from your folks to be out late tonight?"

Bob and Pete nodded eagerly.

"All right then, men. Let's catch us a thief!"

A half hour later, The Three Investigators had assumed their lookout posts as ordered by Jupiter. The First Investigator was crouched in a shadowy alcove directly across the street from Pearl's Bakery. A block away, Bob was slumped down in a doorway across from the hardware store.

Pete, the most nimble and sure-of-foot, shivered atop the roof of Green's Hardware. For although it was summer, nights along the coastline could become quite cold, particularly on foggy nights. And now, as it neared nine o'clock and the sun was all but set, Pete was forced to pull his collar up around his ears.

The second investigator cautiously peered over the facade of the hardware store. He thought the fog had thickened considerably within the last hour. Even Main Street, which was usually active on Friday nights with cruising high school kids, looked eerily deserted. A few cars whispered by occasionally, their headlights glowing like fireflies in the night.

Pete cursed his bad luck at getting stuck atop a building in such miserable weather. The only thing he expected to find tonight was a bad cold.

In attempt to take his mind off the chill, he decided to test his walkie-talkie.

The walkie-talkies were another of Jupe's improvements since the boys had begun their investigation firm. They consisted of a handheld sender and receiver, with a copper wire that ran from the unit around a special belt they each wore. The wire belt acted as an antenna.

"First Investigator, come in." Pete whispered into the receiver. "First Investigator, come in. Over."

There was a short crackle of static, and then Jupe's voice came in, faint but clear.

"First here. Anything to report, Second? Over."

"Not much," Pete said. "Just trying to keep my lips from freezing." He craned his neck to peer over the facade of the building again. "The fog is pretty thick up here. I can barely see the street. Can you see anything down there? Over."

"Negative," Jupe's tinny voice replied. "I'm afraid we picked the worst possible night for a stakeout. The fog is like pea soup. Well, keep your eyes and ears open," the stocky investigator instructed.

"And try to stay warm!" Bob's voice chimed in with a laugh. "Over and out."

"Very funny, Records!" Pete said sarcastically. "I'll over and out you!"

Pete quietly pocketed his walkie-talkie and settled himself in the most comfortable spot he could find – steadying himself for the long night ahead.

The minutes seemed to drag by like hours. Pete's joints became stiff and his mind felt like it was becoming as foggy as the night breeze.

Pete was dreaming he was lost in the fog on a long stretch of beach. The roar of the ocean's waves was very loud in his ears. From the corner of his eye, Pete caught a glimpse of a shadowy spectre that appeared to dart through the mist very close by, its feet making a curious crunching sound in the sand.

Pete gasped in fear and began running blindly along the shrouded coast. But it seemed the faster he ran the closer the monster came – until the beast was right at his heels! Pete tumbled in the sand and screamed...

The Second Investigator started awake with a lurch – his scream still fresh on his lips. He sighed deeply when he realized it had only been a dream.

A dream? That meant he had fallen asleep! Pete risked flicking on his flashlight to glance at his wristwatch.

His watch had stopped – it still read seven o'clock!

With a gulp Pete realized he had no idea how long he had been asleep. Jupe would be furious when he told him that he had fallen asleep on an official stakeout.

The last thing Pete remembered was Jupe ordering radio silence – the first investigator had felt sure that something was bound to happen any minute... and he couldn't remember a thing until his dream.

Pete stretched his long legs and yawned. Rubbing his eyes, he looked across to the other side of the roof where The Vineyard Liquor Store was located.

Pete received a jolt of surprise.

Someone was moving in the fog!

5

A Noise In The Darkness

PETE JUMPED to his feet and gave his stiff joints a quick rub. The tall investigator trotted over to the other side of the roof, his heart thumping loudly in his chest.

He thought about calling out to the intruder and then thought better of it.

Pete's mind raced.

Had he cornered the thief? Or had the thief got the drop on his partners? He couldn't recall the last time he had heard so much as a peep from Jupiter or Bob. He made up his mind and scrambled for his walkie-talkie.

"First," he cried, "do you read me? Jupe, come in!"

As Pete was spotting the intruder on the rooftop, Jupe suddenly sat up straight in the dark doorway he was sharing with a stray cat that had taken an interest in his chocolate chip cookies.

Had he heard something? It had sounded like metal scraping against metal. He moved away from the door he had been leaning against for the last hour.

Jupiter switched off his walkie-talkie – any unnecessary chatter might give away his presence.

He backed as far away from the door as he dared. Even with the thick fog providing a natural cover, he didn't want to give away his hiding place in the shadowy alcove by stepping out into the dim glow of the streetlights.

The stocky boy held his breath and strained his ears for the

sound of scraping metal. He gripped his flashlight tight – intending to use it as a weapon if need be.

Just as he had convinced himself that he had imagined the noise, the soft scratching sound returned.

Jupiter’s hair stood on end.

The doorknob began to silently turn.

Jupe heard the latch slip past its catch and watched tensely as the empty blackness grew wider.

The door slowly yawned open.

A figure in black stepped stealthily through the doorway.

Jupiter gulped as his mind raced. He searched desperately for something to say. Finally he blurted out the first thing that came to his mind. “Excuse me, sir. I was wondering if you could give me directions?” He winced at the lame excuse, considering he was wearing a pair of binoculars around his neck.

Startled by Jupiter’s presence in the dark alcove, the man faltered backward through the darkened doorway.

“Blast it, son – you scared the livin’ tar out of me!” the man barked. “You’re likely to get yourself punched in the nose hidin’ in the dark and scaring people like that!”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Jupiter said, continuing with his story. “I’m just lost. I was hoping you could tell me where I might find Concorde Street?”

“Concorde Street?” the man rasped. “Sorry, kid. You’re out of luck. I’m not from around here. The name’s Jensen. I sell insurance based out of San Francisco.”

Jupiter realized he had been holding his breath and heaved a deep sigh of relief.

Suddenly the creepy stillness of the night was shattered by the shrill screaming of a bell.

“A security alarm!” cried Jupe.

“Can you tell which building it’s coming from?” the man named Jensen demanded.

Jupiter swept his binoculars up and down the fog-laden street. A flash of red caught his eye. “It’s the video arcade,” Jupe shouted. “The Mineshaft!”

He abandoned his position and sprinted across the deserted street, the insurance salesman right at his heels.

“It’s right next door to Green’s Hardware,” Jupe wheezed. “Maybe Pete saw something!”

Jupe, with his stocky build, was soon overtaken by Jensen, who ran stride for stride with him.

“Let’s head around to the back,” Jensen shouted. “Maybe we can catch him as he tries to get away!”

Jupiter had no time to argue. They raced through the fog to the nearest corner and down the sidewalk toward the alley, their shadows stretching into long, ominous shapes before them.

As the two pursuers rounded the corner into the rear street, their feet accidentally became tangled and they both went sprawling to the hard pavement in a jumble of arms and legs.

Jensen sat up slowly and rubbed a knot on his head.

“You okay, kid?” he asked groggily.

“I’ll survive,” Jupiter replied, inspecting his torn trousers. “Just a few minor abrasions.”

The ringing burglar alarm was so loud they nearly had to scream even though they were sitting right next to each other.

Jupe stopped suddenly and gaped. “Look!” he cried, pointing to The Mineshaft’s back entrance. “That small window under the dumpster is open!”

They both jumped to their feet and ran toward the open win-

dow.

“Here, kid. I’ll give you a boost!” Jensen volunteered, getting on his hands and knees. “Use my back. I’ll be right behind you!”

With a little effort, Jupiter sucked in his stomach and squeezed himself through the narrow window. He maneuvered himself as delicately as he could through the tight space, arranging his body so he would land on his feet.

Jupe held onto the window ledge for a moment, his intuition trying desperately to tell him something. He had a nagging feeling that there was something not quite right with this picture, but for the life of him he couldn’t put his finger on it. He finally ignored it and dropped to the floor below.

“I’m in!” he shouted.

There was no reply.

“Jensen?”

Jupiter waited for the salesman to come climbing through the window. “Jensen?” he called again. He began to get an uneasy feeling when, to his surprise, a small bag was tossed through the window, landing at his feet with a metallic clump!

Jupe gingerly picked up the heavy bag and inspected it. On the outside of the bag in large letters read:

ROCKY BEACH FEDERAL BANK
DEPOSIT BAG

He slowly unzipped the bag and held it up to the faint light streaming in through the open window – a gleam of silver flashed inside.

Jupe’s eyes grew wide as he finally comprehended the baffling series of events – and what that nagging feeling was trying

to tell him.

The bag was stuffed full of money!

The owl-faced boy knew in an instant that if he investigated the arcade he would find several vandalized video games – all broken into – and all missing their quarters!

Suddenly, without warning, a bright light cut through the gloom and was shining in his eyes.

“Don’t move, kid!” a gruff voice barked above the wail of the alarm. “You’re under arrest!”

6

Caught Red Handed

“YOU’RE UNDER arrest!” Chief Reynolds barked.

Jupiter Jones stood in the harsh glare of a flashlight, his mouth agape, the bright beam temporarily blinding him. He held an arm up over his round face and squinted into the harsh light.

Bob appeared beside the chief. “Jupe!” he cried in dismay. “What are you doing here?”

Chief Reynolds looked at Bob in surprise. “I could ask you the same question, Mr. Andrews.” He then shot a glance to the stocky boy. “Jones? What in Sam Hill is going on here?”

The normally self-assured First Investigator, who on occasion could even seem smug to friends who didn’t know him very well, found himself at a loss for words for the second time in two days.

“I – I, came through... the w-window...”

“I’m seriously hoping you’ve got a very good explanation, young man!” the chief said impatiently.

Somewhere a police officer found the master light switch and the overhead lights flickered on – they hummed quietly as the alarm was turned off.

Jupiter straightened himself and cleared his throat. He had obviously been fooled completely by the man calling himself Jensen. He collected his wits and replayed the series of events that led up to his being discovered inside the The Mineshaft, holding a bag of money!

“It all started...” he began,

But Jupe didn’t get a chance to explain, for he was interrupt-

ed once more by another shrill bell.

“That’s another alarm!” Bob shouted, grabbing Jupe’s arm.

One of Chief Reynolds’ men came running up from the front of the store. “Someone has broken into The Vineyard liquor store two buildings over!” said the cop excitedly. “He’s trapped inside – we’ve covered all the exits!”

Chief Reynolds yanked his hat down tightly on his head and ran for the front door. “Let’s go!” he ordered. “You too, Jones.”

Jupiter didn’t need to be told twice. He and Bob were right behind the chief as they burst out into the foggy night and sprinted towards The Vineyard Liquor Store.

They pulled up at the front entrance and immediately began cupping their hands to the glass trying to peer inside the darkened store. Chief Reynolds fumbled with his massive key ring, searching for the master key that unlocked all the downtown stores. He finally found the right key and inserted it into the lock. As the ringing alarm came to an abrupt halt, the chief called out to the thief trapped inside the store.

“I’m turning on the lights and coming in! Do not move! Get down on your knees with your hands on your head!” The chief pulled out his billy club and began to move cautiously into the store. He turned to Jupe and Bob with a set jaw and whispered. “You two stay here!”

Bob and Jupe watched their friend march inside. They looked at each other and knew exactly what the other was thinking. They had to know who the thief was!

“We’ll keep out of sight,” Jupe whispered. On tiptoe, they crept stealthily through the doorway as the overhead lights winked on.

The boys inched around a center aisle, noticing a nylon rope

dangling from a vent in the ceiling – a set-up they were all too familiar with. When they came upon the thief kneeling on the floor they both gasped at once.

“Pete!”

Pete was kneeling with his back to the group, his hands on top of his head. As he craned his neck around, Jupe and Bob saw that his eyes as big as saucers.

“It’s not what it looks like...” he moaned. “I was fooled hook, line and sinker, Jupe. I swear it’s the truth!”

Chief Reynolds took charge. “Search the rest of the store,” he commanded to his officers. “Get up, Pete, and tell us what happened.”

Pete rose sheepishly and cleared his throat. “I fell asleep during the stakeout,” he began.

“Stakeout?” the Chief cried. “What stakeout?”

“We were watching the downtown businesses,” Jupiter explained. “We wanted to apprehend the criminal who went to such pains to frame us.”

“That’s dangerous,” the Chief said seriously. “You could have been hurt. I know you think you’re some kind of Sherlock Holmes, Jupiter Jones, but this is one you should have left for the police to handle.”

“Yes, sir,” Jupe agreed. Eager to change the subject, he turned to Pete. “Go on with your story, Second.”

Pete shrugged. “Well, when I woke up I thought I saw someone on the next rooftop over. I jumped to the next rooftop, and then the next, which was The Vineyard Liquor Store. That’s when I saw the skylight was open and a rope was hanging down into the store. Since you fellows weren’t responding on the walkie-talkies, I decided to try to catch the thief by myself.”

“That was very brave, Pete,” said Chief Reynolds, “but also very dangerous. You should have yelled from the rooftops.”

Pete looked down at his sneakers. “I guess I wasn’t thinking,” he said. “Well, I climbed down the rope and as soon as I touched the floor the alarm went off. It nearly gave me a heart attack!”

The chief looked grim. “Clearly this is no ordinary thief we’re dealing with,” he said seriously. “Someone is going to great lengths to discredit you boys – and it’s starting to get dangerous!”

He looked directly at Jupiter.

“From now on I want you to stay home, Jones. This is a matter strictly for the police!”

Jupe looked crestfallen. He hated more than anything to give up in the middle of a mystery. “But chief...” he began.

“No buts, Jones,” he said sternly, “you’re not to leave home, understand?”

Bob, Pete, and Jupiter collected their gear and walked off into the foggy night toward their homes – each thinking that they had finally faced their first defeat as investigators.

All the while the non-descript black sedan silently tailed behind the boys like the shadow of some great predator.

7

Jupiter Has Suspicions

THE NEXT DAY the boys met at The Jones Salvage Yard. Bob and Pete sat around the big desk in headquarters with glum expressions on their faces. Bob turned the pages of a magazine in dejection, while Pete sat with his chin on his palms and sighed.

Suddenly Jupe's head popped up from Tunnel Two. He was smiling cheerfully.

"What are you so happy about?" asked Bob suspiciously.

"Aunt Mathilda must have made pancakes for breakfast," said Pete, trying to laugh.

"Aunt Mathilda," said Jupe, "did indeed make pancakes for breakfast – but that isn't what I'm smiling about," he said mysteriously.

Bob pushed away the magazine he had been leafing through. "We've just been handed our first unsolved case and you're acting as if nothing happened," he said. "What gives?"

Jupe was only half-listening. He was busily digging around in the back of the trailer looking for equipment in one of Headquarter's small closets.

"Ah-ha!" he cried. "Here it is!" He pulled out the tailing device he had constructed some time ago for a previous case. The small metal box dripped a fluid at a steady pace when attached to a vehicle by a strong magnet on its backside. The boys simply had to follow the trail.

"This case is far from unsolved," said Jupe. "In fact, we may be closer to solving it than we think."

“What?” cried Bob. “Chief Reynolds said we were off the case!”

“Negative,” said Jupe with a sly smile on his pudgy face. “What he said was: ‘to stay at home’, specifically, for *me* to stay at home,” he said with triumph. “He never said for you two to stay at home – and he definitely did not say we were off the case!”

Bob and Pete knew better than to argue with Jupiter when it came to matters of memory. Jupe’s memory was photographic, that meant he was quite capable of remembering what most people said word for word and could recall it whenever he needed to.

Bob and Pete sat up straight with excitement. “What do you have in mind, First?” asked Bob.

“I was laying in bed last night,” said Jupe with enthusiasm, “thinking about our case, when it occurred to me that there is one person in Rocky Beach who would have a lot to gain by discrediting us. In fact, this person would stand to gain four thousand dollars to be exact. He told Bob as much himself.”

“I don’t get it,” said Pete.

Bob thought for a second and then snapped his fingers in excitement. “Jupe means Leo Magellan, the art historian who is sharing the Rotary Club prize money with us,” cried Bob. “Of course! Why didn’t I think of that?”

“I didn’t think of it either, Bob, until last night,” replied Jupe. “I really should have arrived at the conclusion from the start,” he said, chastising himself for overlooking the obvious.

Pete thought he finally understood. “So Magellan frames us for the break-ins, hoping to smear our name so he can pocket the whole prize for himself, right?”

“Precisely, Pete,” Jupiter confirmed. “And now you two will go over to the Rocky Beach Museum of Arts and Sciences where

one of you will confront Mr. Magellan while the other watches from a distance to see what happens. Then you shall follow him after being confronted.”

Bob looked thoughtful. “You think he might get nervous around us and let something slip, Jupe?”

“I do. And when he does we’ll have it all on tape.”

Jupe pulled a small tape recorder out of a drawer in one of the many file cabinets that lined one wall of headquarters.

“Have this on record when you talk to him. My hope is he’ll get upset enough, or, more likely, arrogant enough because we’re only kids, to let something slip,” explained Jupe. “Then we’ll have all we need to clear our name.”

Pete looked skeptical. “That sounds good, Jupe, but what if Magellan doesn’t feel like talking? Everyone knows he hates kids. I doubt he’ll give us the time of day.”

“I’ve got a hunch that just seeing you will be enough to elicit paranoid behavior,” explained Jupiter. “However, one of you has to get him to talk. We only want to use the trailing device as a last resort. Remember, Chief Reynolds doesn’t want us involved anymore.”

“Should we go now?” asked Bob.

“No, let’s wait until it’s closer to the museum’s closing time so you two can see where he goes if need be,” replied Jupe.

“Okay,” said Bob. “then I’ll run home for a couple of hours. I promised dad I’d help him clean up the garage today.”

“Fine,” agreed Jupe. “In the meantime, Pete and I can put in some extra work for Aunt Mathilda – she’s been complaining about a large stack of lumber in the far corner of the yard for some time now. Won’t she be surprised if we took care of it without being asked?”

“After a lunch of ham sandwiches, french-fries, cookies and lemonade, of course.” said Pete with a grin.

“Of course,” agreed Jupe, licking his lips.

The three boys scrambled out of the trailer with rumbling stomachs.

8

The Man Who Hated Kids

IT WAS AFTERNOON by the time Bob pedaled his bicycle back to the Jones Salvage Yard. He deftly hopped off and pried a knot from one of the boards in the fence. Reaching his fingers inside, he pulled a catch that activated Green Gate One, and then entered into Jupe's outdoor workshop.

Pete and Jupe were already there.

"Ready to go?" Bob asked.

"I don't see why I have to talk to this crank," grumbled Pete. "Bob is better at this kind of thing than I am."

Jupe was busy putting a fresh cassette into the small recording device. "It'll be good practice, Second," he said. "Just remember to stand up straight, speak slowly and clearly, and act as an adult would in this situation," he instructed.

"But what'll I ask him?" cried Pete, running his fingers nervously through his hair.

Jupiter leaned against the printing press and thought for a moment – deciding what he might say in that situation. Finally he nodded his head.

"Simply say you are doing a report for school on crime. Ask Mr. Magellan if the museum has any safeguards against a break-in. Then see what his reaction is. Carry on with that line of questioning if you can and see what happens," Jupe explained patiently. "If he reacts the way I think he will, with his notorious temper, we'll have enough on tape to solve this case by sundown."

"I still don't see why Bob gets off easy," Pete muttered under



his breath.

“Next case I’ll handle the dirty work,” Bob laughed as he pushed his bike back out of the secret entrance. “Now come on.”

“I’ll be by the phone if there are any developments,” Jupe shouted after them.

Bob nodded that he understood as the two investigators pedaled their bikes toward the art museum.

They had only gone a couple of blocks when Bob turned to Pete with an anxious expression on his face.

“What’s wrong?” asked Pete.

“I could be mistaken,” Bob hissed, “but I think someone is following us!”

“Where?” asked Pete. He had learned from Jupe long before, that, as an investigator, you should never turn around to see if you’re being followed. Turning around let the person know you were on to them. He waited for Bob to explain.

“A black car about a block behind us,” said Bob. “I noticed it as we left the salvage yard.”

“Do you think we should do the flat-tire routine?”

Bob nodded in agreement. The flat-tire bit was something Jupe had come up with for just such an occasion.

Pete pulled up short on his bike and jumped off while Bob circled around and waited for him to examine his tire. Pete checked the spokes and squeezed his front tire several times, checking it thoroughly. This provided Bob plenty of time to get a good look at the black car.

“Either it was a false alarm, or he saw us,” said Bob. “He turned at the first corner.”

Several minutes later the boys were coasting their bicycles up a tree-lined, circular drive that gave way to a breathtaking view of

a large stone building with many marble pillars. An enormous fountain with two angels was placed in front of the museum, and banners of all different colors announced exhibits that were currently on display.

Bob enjoyed the museum, and he and Jupe often visited even when they weren't on a case. Pete, on the other hand, preferred sports to art and only entered the museum when a case demanded it. He would much rather be surfing or watching baseball with his dad. Pete couldn't imagine anything more boring than a museum.

Now, as they neared the huge white steps that ascended to the front entrance, Bob whispered fiercely to his partner.

"Pete, look!"

Pete stared in the direction that Bob was pointing.

Leo Magellan was in the museum parking lot, getting out of his car.

A black sedan!

The museum director shoved the keys into his pocket and, muttering to himself, walked hurriedly into the side entrance of the museum. He seemed to be greatly agitated.

"I wonder where he went so late in the day?" Pete asked out loud. "Can you tell if that's the same car, Records?"

Bob looked doubtful. "Hard to say for certain. I guess it looks like it."

"Well, let's get this over with," sighed Pete.

Bob pushed his bicycle toward the parking lot and grabbed the trailing device out of his pocket, while Pete parked his bicycle and marched up the steep steps toward the museum's front entrance. Pete stopped at the top and looked back at Bob. The Records and Research man gave his friend a winning smile and a thumbs-up.

Pete took a deep breath.

“Do what Jupiter would do,” he told himself. He clicked the tiny cassette recorder into the *record* mode and entered the museum.

It was as quiet as a tomb inside the great hall. The bones of a very mean looking Tyrannosaurus Rex glared down hungrily at Pete as the Second Investigator searched for Leo Magellan.

As it turned out, he didn't have to look very hard. In fact, he had only to follow his ears. From somewhere on the second level, the irate voice of Magellan could be heard shouting at someone, his nasally voice echoing throughout the entire complex.

A long, polished marble banister formed an ornate railing along one side of the steps. Gulping, Pete grabbed it and started climbing the stairs.

“Kids!” Magellan was shouting. “Kids obviously had something to do with this. But why anyone would spray-paint question marks on vases from the Won Dynasty is beyond me. It will cost the museum a fortune to have them fixed! And you call yourself a security guard...”

Pete rounded a corner to see Leo Magellan shaking his finger at a man in a uniform with a crew-cut and a pistol at his side. Magellan was a very short man with bushy black eyebrows – he looked to Pete like a feisty muskrat.

He was still yelling at the red-faced security guard. “We simply must start using something other than velvet ropes to keep those hoodlums away from the exhibits! What do I pay you for, anyway?”

Pete heard the dismayed security guard growl an angry reply. “It wasn't my shift, Mr. Magellan – Jensen was on this level last night.”

Jensen?

Pete's mind raced. Where had he heard that name before?

He cleared his throat and approached the angry museum director.

"Excuse me, sir..." Pete began.

"That must be one of them now!" Magellan crowed. "Arrest the vandal!"

The hulking security guard hesitated for a moment, and then took a few menacing steps toward Pete.

"Please, sir, I just wanted to ask you a few questions," he pleaded.

"Second level is off limits, kid. I suggest you beat it before I call the cops," said the security guard. "Unless, that is, you've come to confess."

"Has the museum been vandalized, sir?" asked Pete, trying to act in his most adult manner.

"As if you didn't know," sneered Magellan. "Lousy kids will do anything for a thrill these days!" Magellan turned an accusing finger to Pete. "What's your name, boy?" he croaked, his beady eyes narrowing. "What are you doing up here anyway?"

Pete began backing away towards the steps. He didn't like the way this conversation was going. "I heard sh-shouting..." he stammered. "I needed t-to talk to you, sir..."

The cranky museum director and the burly security guard began advancing toward Pete. He didn't waste any time. Whirling around, Pete straddled the long marble banister and slid the fifty foot length of the railing to the lower level.

His speedy feet were already running before they hit the ground.

The two men came clattering down the long flight of stairs

after him, but by then the athletic Second Investigator was out the front door and racing toward his bicycle.

“Bob!” he called. “Records – where are you?”

But Bob was nowhere to be found. Pete raced to where they had parked their bicycles.

Bob’s bicycle was gone!

9

No Stranger To Danger

BOB WATCHED Pete enter the museum and then made for Leo Magellan's black sedan in the parking lot to attach the trailing device. He was ten yards from the car when a meaty hand clamped over his mouth and a harsh voice seethed in his ear.

“Stay quiet, kid, or I break your neck!”

Bob found himself being roughly dragged toward a beat up white van covered in dents and rust – the battered back doors standing open like a hungry mouth waiting to swallow him up.

He flailed about, but the man was too strong.

In desperation, Bob jutted his chin up violently and sank his teeth as hard as he could into the assailant's hand. The man howled in pain. Bob began yelling at the top of his lungs.

“Help! Kidnapper! Help!”

He tried to tear loose, but the kidnapper was too quick and grabbed Bob by his wrist in an icy, vice-like grip.

Bob gasped in pain.

The wiry investigator had only seconds to formulate a plan.

As always, he tried to think how Jupe would handle himself in a tough spot like this. Without hesitating a moment, Bob went limp and pretended to faint – sinking to the pavement in a heap.

As he did this he secretly attached the tracking device to the bumper of the van – activating the homemade device.

He and Pete often teased Jupe for being so brainy, but they always found themselves being thankful for his many inventions.

As the heavysset kidnapper grabbed him by the shirt and tossed

him roughly into the back of the van, Bob tried to catch a glimpse of the criminal through his eyelids. The mystery man was wearing a ski-mask, but Bob could see by his build that he was a large, powerfully built man.

The doors slammed shut and Bob was left in the darkness of the van's interior. He could feel he was on a tarpaulin and that there were several boxes of what sounded like tools scattered about. The resourceful investigator began to frantically paw through the toolboxes in search of a weapon – or possibly something he could use to pry open the door.

He could only hope that Pete would see the trail from the tracking device and guess what had happened.

But Bob soon realized that Pete would be looking for a trail leading from Magellan's car! He felt panic setting in. Would Pete understand that he had put the device on a different car? He forced himself to remain calm. Jupiter was always preaching that losing one's head in a stressful situation was the worst thing you could do.

Staying calm was the key – and besides, Bob Andrews was no stranger to danger. This wasn't the first time he had found himself in a jam. He had gotten out of all of them before, and he would get out of this one too – if he stayed level-headed.

Having reassured himself, Bob began searching the back of the van with a renewed vigor. His hands clasped around the heavy handle of what felt like a monkey-wrench.

He allowed himself a grin. When that creep finally opened the door, he would find a big surprise waiting for him.

Bob felt the van slowing down. His heart raced even faster. They drove up a steep incline, leveled off, and then jerked to a halt.

Bob heard a door slam and then footsteps walking toward the back of the van. He gripped his weapon tightly and prepared himself for battle!

The van doors were suddenly swung open and a bright light glared in Bob's eyes as he came out swinging.

But to Bob's dismay he found that his capturer had lightning fast reactions and all attempts at self-defense were quickly subdued by some form of martial arts.

His attacker caught the flailing wrench between his clasped bare hands and twisted it from Bob's grasp with hardly an effort.

Next, the captor's foot shot out like lightning and knocked Bob's feet out from under him. He landed on his back with a thud, the wind knocked out of him.

As he gasped for air, realization suddenly dawned on him. This man was very small. The man who had kidnapped him was a very lean, muscular man. They must be partners!

Now that his eyes had adjusted to the light, he saw that he was in the parking bay of an abandoned warehouse.

The harsh sunlight was cut off as the large garage door rattled closed. A short Oriental man, roughly the same height as Bob, stood before him wearing a black silk outfit – a cruel smile broke out on his face revealing crooked, yellowing teeth.

“Butterfly caught in spider's web!” he said in broken English. “Now we wait for spider to return, hmm?” The small Oriental laughed cruelly and pushed Bob along a dank corridor to a small room that had “Office” painted on the door. The room was completely empty.

The Oriental clamped a gloved hand on Bob's shoulder, bringing him to a stop. Without a word he shoved a can of spray-paint into Bob's hand – and just as quickly it was swiped back from his

grasp. He was then pushed roughly into the room – the door slamming hard behind him. It didn't take Bob long to figure out why the Oriental gave him a can of spray-paint only to take it away again.

The walls were covered in graffiti – specifically, question marks. And now his fingerprints were on the can of paint!

Bob Andrews saw the magnitude of his predicament and wasted no time examining his prison.

Bare stone walls led up to a fifteen foot ceiling. The only window was ten feet above the floor; impossible for him to reach.

The floor itself was concrete and showed no cracks or wear. It looked hopeless to Bob.

He sank to the floor in defeat.

10

Pete Saves The Day

IT HAD SEEMED like days since Bob had been forced into the back of the van at the museum parking lot.

Looking at his watch, Bob knew in reality it had only been a couple of hours. Still, his hope was fading as fast as the bright red sun dipping below the ocean's horizon. In about an hour it would be dark – a thought that made Bob's heart race in terror.

Where was Pete? Had he not figured out that the tracking device was put on a different car? Surely he would return to headquarters and tell Jupiter. Juve would then return to the scene and quickly deduce what had happened.

Bob stood up and began pacing back and forth in the small office. Suddenly his heart leapt.

Had he heard something outside the window? He held his breath and waited for the noise to return.

There it was again – a clanking noise followed by a rough, metallic scraping.

Someone was outside!

Bob backed away from the wall and looked up toward the window. A shadowy face appeared on the other side of the grimy glass window.

Bob breathed a sigh of relief – It was Pete peering in through the glass. The Second Investigator grinned at Bob and then motioned for him to be quiet as he worked at pushing open the rusty windowpane. The window finally came open – squealing with protest.

Bob looked nervously toward the office door, then up at Pete. “Do you have a rope?” Bob whispered.

Pete shook his head no. “Throw me your shirt,” he whispered back. Bob quickly tore off his shirt and tossed it up to Pete, who disappeared from sight for what seemed an eternity.

While waiting for Pete to return, Bob heard another noise. It was the sound of the large garage door opening.

His attackers had returned!

“Pete...” he whispered. “Pete, hurry!”

Bob heard footsteps approaching. “Someone’s coming,” he hissed.

The footsteps came closer and closer – where was Pete?

Just then Pete’s head reappeared at the window. He had torn Bob’s shirt and his own into strips and binded them together into a make-shift rope. He tossed the rope through the window and Bob grabbed hold just as the office door was slammed open!

“So, butterfly flutters wings, hmm?” said the Oriental.

The short man rushed into the room as Pete heaved on the rope. His yellow teeth flashed in a cruel grin as he managed to get a hand on Bob’s foot. But he couldn’t hold on as the small boy scrambled wildly up the rope.

As Bob climbed through the opening of the window, he saw that Pete had stacked several oil drums on top of each other until he could reach the window.

He swung his feet down on them and looked back through the window. The Oriental had grasped the rope and begun climbing after them! When he neared the top, Pete let go of the rope and leaped for safety. He heard a startled squawk as their attacker fell to the floor.

Pete landed in a cloud of dust, followed closely by his small-



er partner.

“Ahhh!” Bob cried.

A jolt of pain seared up his right leg, making him gasp.

A long time ago, Bob had been foolish enough to attempt climbing the cliffs near Rocky Beach by himself. The fall had left his leg broken in umpteen places— a record according to Doctor Alvarez. He had been forced to wear a brace on his leg until it was well enough for him to walk on again.

Although he hadn't worn the brace for many months, it now seemed Bob had stressed the mended fracture when he jumped from the oil drums. Pete rushed back and put his arm around him for support.

“Are you okay?” he asked, throwing a glance up to the window. “Can you walk?”

Bob gritted his teeth. “Yeah, but not too far, okay?”

“My bike is hidden in the bushes not far ahead. Can you make it?”

Bob had a determined look on his face. “Try me!” he said stubbornly.

Pete grinned and helped his friend hobble as quickly as possible to the bike, all the while looking over his shoulder to see if the Oriental was in pursuit. When they reached it, Pete had Bob sit on the handlebars while he pedaled as hard as he could in the direction of the Jones Salvage Yard.

“How did you find me?” Bob asked in relief. “Did you follow the trail from the tracking device?”

Pete told of his narrow escape from Leo Magellan and the security guard. “I wasn't able to return to the museum until they had left for the day,” he explained. “When I went back I didn't see a trail from where Magellan's car was parked. I knew you would-

n't leave without a good reason, so on a hunch I looked around the rest of the parking lot until I found the trail. I followed it right here. Lucky for you I found you on the first window I tried."

"Golly, that was good work, Pete!" said Bob with admiration. "Wait until we get back to the salvage yard and tell Jupe the adventure he missed while he sat by the phone!"

The sun was just setting as Pete wheeled his bicycle through the big iron gates of the salvage yard. Konrad directed them back to Jupe's workshop where he said Jupe had been fussing about since the boys had left.

"Jupe in bad mood," Konrad warned. "Better be careful don't mention work," he grinned playfully. "He says no American boy should be working so hard as him."

The boys laughed and figured what had happened. Aunt Mathilda had cornered Jupe and put him to work on one of her endless projects stacking, sorting, organizing, and rebuilding junk.

Pete pedaled his bicycle to Jupe's workshop, Bob still sitting on the handlebars. They found their stocky friend sitting grumpily on a folding chair – watching for the special light above the printing press to flicker indicating there was a call on the telephone inside headquarters.

Jupe looked up when he saw his friends arrive and quickly noticed that Bob was limping. Concern immediately washed over his face.

"You're injured! What happened? Did you run into difficulties?"

"You could say that," Pete said dryly.

"While you were stuck here being worked to death by Aunt Mathilda, we were out finding another piece to the puzzle," joked

Bob. "If Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus put you to work tomorrow, Pete and I should have this case licked!" he teased.

But Jupe was very serious. "You've re-injured your leg, Records. We should transport you to the hospital immediately!"

Bob reluctantly agreed. He really wanted to fill Jupe in on their exciting day, but he had to admit that his leg was hurting badly. "I guess you're right," he shrugged. "But we'll tell you what happened on the way."

"Agreed," said Jupe. "I have to make a phone call in headquarters, then I'll ask Uncle Titus to drive us to the hospital while you call your folks from the house and let them know what happened."

Moments later the two boys were packed into the salvage yard's large pickup, Bob sitting on Pete's lap. They filled Jupiter in on the day's adventures, being sure to include the fact that someone named Jensen was working at the museum, and that several vases from the Won Dynasty had been vandalized with question marks.

"And you're sure the person who grabbed you was not the same person who let you out of the van?" asked Jupe.

"Positive," Bob replied. "The guy who grabbed me was burly, very strong. The one who let me out was a very small, short Oriental man. Definitely not the same person."

Jupe seemed lost in thought as Konrad parked the truck in front of the hospital doors. "We're here," said Konrad. "I carry Bob inside."

"That's okay, Konrad, it's not that bad," Bob protested.

"No, Bob, you should not be walking. I carry you now," the big Bavarian said sternly.

As the boys climbed out they saw a grey sedan pull up beside

the truck. It was Worthington, the boys' personal chauffeur.

Some time before, Jupiter had won the use of a gold plated Rolls-Royce from the Rent-'n-Ride Auto Rental Company in a contest they had sponsored. The splendid car had come complete with a proper English driver named Worthington. Over the course of many investigations, Worthington had come to take a keen interest in the boys cases, and now considered himself an "unofficial" fourth investigator. The prim English driver rushed up to the party.

"Master Andrews, you're injured!" he cried.

"It's not that bad, Worthington," Bob explained. "I just landed wrong and stressed my leg a little."

"We should let Doctor Alvarez be the judge of that," Worthington said seriously. The group entered the lobby where Doctor Alvarez and Bob's parents were already waiting. As Konrad carried Bob off to be X-rayed, Jupiter ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head in disgust.

"I feel responsible for Bob's injury" he said. "I should have went myself and let Bob handle the phone calls."

"You can't blame yourself, First," said Pete. "How many times have we gotten into a tight corner on a case? You've been injured yourself – so have I. Bob will be back to his old self in no time."

"Master Crenshaw is quite right," Worthington agreed. "You mustn't hold yourself responsible. There is a case to be solved with your reputations at stake. Unless I'm very much mistaken, Master Andrews would want you to continue your inquiries toward the solution.

"I suppose you're right," Jupe sighed. "There is no sense dwelling on this particular setback. Did you find out anything

Worthington?”

“Find out?” asked Pete. “Find out what?”

“You and Bob were not the only ones who did some investigating today,” said Jupe. “While you were at the museum I made some phone calls. One was to Worthington who agreed to do some investigating for us. Okay Worthington, what did you find out?”

Worthington rubbed his chin and cleared his throat. “I’m afraid Master Jones – that it appears your deductions were completely wrong!”

11

Jupiter Is Mistaken

“WRONG?” cried Jupe. “But I was so sure.”

Worthington shrugged his shoulders and sat down on the hospital waiting room’s oversized couch.

“I used my membership with the Rocky Beach Art Guild to check the attendance roster of the Art Appreciation meeting last night at the museum,” the tall chauffeur explained. “Leo Magellan was there from six o’clock until well past midnight – according to the roster.”

“Then there is no way he could have taken part in the break-ins. And I was so sure he was involved somehow,” Jupe said. “Unless the roster was tampered with. Magellan could have had someone forge his signature in the guest book.”

“A distinct possibility,” admitted Worthington. “That is why I took the liberty to inquire with several members whether they actually *saw* Mr. Magellan at the Art Appreciation meeting. There are many credible witnesses who positively identified him in attendance last night.”

“Then that crank Magellan is in the clear,” said Pete, relieved. “I’m glad I don’t have to tangle with his temper again! But Jupe, you said you made some calls, who else did you talk to?”

“The other person I called was Chief Reynolds. He said they located Skinny Norris in Seaside – but the sneak isn’t talking. He says he knows his rights and doesn’t have to talk without his lawyer present. Unfortunately, he’s right. I’m at a loss where to turn next on this case,” Jupe sighed dejectedly.

“We still have the two guys in the white van who nabbed Bob,” offered Pete. “They may be working for Magellan,” he added.

Jupiter seemed rejuvenated as he mulled this over for a moment and then slapped his hand on a stack of magazines with a renewed vigor.

“It seemed to me from the start that Leo Magellan was too convenient a suspect – but I was careless and didn’t listen to my instincts for the second time on this case; and it nearly cost us Bob!” Jupe said seriously. “It won’t happen again.”

“So what’s our next move going to be, First?” asked Pete.

“I think tomorrow we should pay a visit to that warehouse that Bob’s captors took him to. Do you think you can remember how to get there?”

“No problem,” Pete said. “But I’ll just wait at headquarters for you to get back. Going there twice in two days is not my idea of a fun way to spend my summer vacation. Thanks, but no thanks!”

Jupiter Jones was used to this kind of talk from the Second Investigator. Pete had a strong aversion to danger, but in the end he always stuck by his friends.

“I guess you could stay at headquarters and help out in the yard,” replied Jupiter slowly. “I heard Aunt Mathilda tell Konrad that Uncle Titus and Hans would be picking up a truck load of claw-footed bath tubs tomorrow.”

“That’s all the convincing I need,” cried Pete. “I’ll be there first thing in the morning! But what about Chief Reynolds warning you to stay at home, Jupe?” he asked.

“I was home all day long yesterday – you and Bob can vouch for me,” grinned Jupe. “He never said *how long* I had to stay home!”

Just then Bob came rolling into the room in a wheelchair, his lower leg encased in a cast.

“How are you feeling, Bob?” Jupiter asked, expressing genuine concern for his friend.

“Oh, I’ll be fine,” Bob said morosely. “But Doc Alvarez says I’m to dig out that old leg-brace of mine. Looks like I’ll be out of action for the rest of this case.”

Early the next morning, Jupiter and Pete arrived at the museum parking lot. Once there, Pete retraced the steps he had taken while following the tracking device Bob had planted on the bottom of the van.

They had bicycled several miles until they were well out of Rocky Beach and into an industrial neighborhood between Rocky Beach and Santa Monica. Jupe was beginning to think that Pete was lost, when suddenly he pulled up short on his bike.

“There it is!” he cried. The second investigator pointed to a large white building located in the isolated business district.

“At least I’m pretty sure that’s the place,” Pete said. “I was so keyed up on the ride home, I couldn’t say for sure. And to tell you the truth I don’t really want to get any closer to find out!”

“We’ll only have to see if the kidnappers are inside,” explained Jupiter. “Once we know they are occupying the facility, we simply have to find a pay-phone and alert the proper authorities.”

But the boys were out of luck. When they reached the abandoned warehouse and snuck up close enough to peer inside, they discovered it to be empty. Jupe ordered a minute search of the area for clues. They found nothing except tire tracks of the van leading up to, and then away from the building.

“Looks like we’re out of luck, First,” said Pete in frustration.

“I guess you’re right, Second,” agreed Jupe. “We’ll simply have to attempt another approach tomorrow. There’s something about this case that is bothering me, but I can’t quite put my finger on it,” he said. “Regardless, the Rotary Club banquet is in two days and we haven’t been notified that we’re not welcome, so maybe we should concentrate on that for now. Frankly, I’m completely baffled!”

Pete looked at Jupe with raised eyebrows. It was a rare occasion when Jupiter Jones admitted he was stumped!

12

A Key Deduction

WHEN JUPE arrived home that evening he stopped to make sure the salvage yard was locked up tight. He could see the faint glow of a television coming from the small cottage shared by Hans and Konrad, and could hear the hearty laughter of the brothers booming from an open window.

Smiling, Jupe walked across the street to the small house that he lived in with his uncle and aunt.

The stout investigator was feeling moody and he only picked at his dinner, which caused some alarm with his aunt and uncle. Throughout the night, events of the past week circled through his head, and he kept trying to sort them out and make some sense of them. He felt there was unquestionably a pattern being followed in this case. If he looked hard enough, he was sure he could spot it. But as the sun slipped down past the horizon, the pattern remained stubbornly hidden.

He tossed and turned in his bed and fell asleep with the case of the three impostors on his mind.

Jupe knew it must be morning. He hadn't opened his eyes yet, but he could smell the breakfast of eggs and bacon that Aunt Mathilda was cooking downstairs in the kitchen. He swung his legs out of bed and yawned. The yawn was quickly followed by a frown as he thought of the firm's current mystery.

Frustrated that he had made little progress on the case, Jupiter retrieved a large volume from his bookshelf entitled: 'CRIMI-

NAL INVESTIGATION: A Comprehensive Index of Detection.’ He thumbed through it until he found a passage that caught his attention. The article suggested that when a detective was at an impasse on a case, one way to achieve a breakthrough was to list on a piece of paper all of the elements of the case and attempt to find a common link.

Ignoring the smell of Aunt Mathilda’s breakfast, Jupiter pulled a pencil and sheet of paper from his desk and began jotting down all of the points of the case that he could think of: Pearl’s Bakery, The Mineshaft, The Vineyard, the Won Dynasty vase...

After several minutes had passed, he leaned back and observed his work.

Jupiter blinked his eyes once and stood in front of his desk, his mouth agape. Quite suddenly, all of the pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit together perfectly in his mind.

Throwing on his clothes he raced downstairs and grabbed the phone.

“Mercy and goodness and sweetness and light!” His Aunt Mathilda cried. “No horseplay before you’ve put something in your stomach, Jupiter Jones! You’ll shrivel up and blow away in the wind if you don’t get some meat on those scrawny bones!”

“Can I please make this phone call, Aunt Mathilda? It’s really urgent,” Jupe pleaded.

Uncle Titus looked over the top of his newspaper and snorted at his wife. “The game is afoot, my dear. Let the boy make his call and I’ll wager dollars to donuts he’ll gladly eat anything you put before him.”

Aunt Mathilda huffed and continued bustling about the kitchen. Jupe grinned at his uncle and began dialing Pete’s number.

A half an hour later the boys were convened at Bob's house, sitting on either side of their friend's bed. Bob sat propped up on some pillows, his leg still in the bulky cast.

"I figured since you were incapacitated we would hold a meeting at your house, Bob," Jupe explained.

"In-ca-what?" asked Pete, scratching his head.

"Never mind," said Bob. "So – what's the big news Jupe?"

Jupe's eyes twinkled and he smiled maddingly.

"I've achieved a breakthrough" he announced, holding up his large book of criminal detection. "And I did it with a little assistance from this rather cumbersome tome."

"What's that?" Pete blinked. "A dictionary?"

"It's a volume of criminal investigative techniques" Jupe explained. "In the book, it suggests listing all of the elements of a case on a piece of paper, and then trying to find a common link from all of the elements."

"Okay – so what's the link?" demanded Pete.

Jupiter handed his page of notes over to Bob and Pete so they could examine them.

"When I used this technique, all the pieces of the puzzle seemed to fall into place. The bakery that was broken into was *Pearl's Bakery*. The hardware store was *Green's*. The arcade was *The Mineshaft*. The liquor store was *The Vineyard*. The phony insurance salesman's name was *Jensen*. The vandalized vases at the museum were from the *Won Dynasty*.

"Now what do the names Green, Jensen and Won, pearls, a mineshaft, and a vineyard all have in common?"

Pete leaped off the bed. "*The Mystery of the Green Ghost!*" he cried, referring to one of the boy's very first cases. But then he shook his head and looked helplessly from Bob to Jupe. "But

you're going to have to explain it to me. What does one of our old cases have to do with someone trying to make us look bad today?"

"One word, Pete. Revenge!"

"Revenge? So someone from one of our old cases really *is* out to get us!" cried Pete. "Who do you think it is, First?"

"Let me guess!" said Bob. "I bet Jupe is thinking it's Mr. Won – the mysterious Chinese man who claimed to be one hundred and seven years old! He would be out for revenge because we smashed the last of the ghost pearls. And, there's the fact that the man that attacked me was Oriental."

"Mr. Won? That's one name I never wanted to hear again," sighed Pete. "One case was enough for that guy."

"You're close Bob, but not quite right," Jupiter said dramatically.

"It's not Mr. Won?" Bob asked. "Then who do you think it is?"

"I'll admit that I thought it was Mr. Won at first as well – however, that seemed too convenient, and revenge seems out of character for Won. I don't believe he would bother with three boys from Rocky Beach. After all, we didn't really destroy the necklace of Ghost Pearls on purpose, it was just an accident."

"Well if it's not Won, then who?" Pete demanded.

Jupe shrugged as if the answer were as obvious to Pete and Bob as it was to him. "I deduce the so-called 'insurance salesman' was actually using his real name."

"Jensen?" Bob exclaimed. "The foreman at Verdant Valley. Revenge wouldn't be out of character for that guy, that's for sure."

"Gleepls!" said Pete. "He never was caught after escaping

from Hashknife Canyon. But what is he doing here in Rocky Beach? And why now after all this time?"

Jupiter pulled a small leather pouch out from his front pocket and dumped the contents out on Bob's bed. "That's what I've got these for," he said proudly. "To trap Jensen once and for all and find out the answers to those very questions!"

Pete and Bob looked at the contents of the bag with wide eyes. There on Bob's mattress lay a dull-grey pile of pearls. Ghost pearls!

13

Setting A Trap

“GHOST PEARLS!” Bob and Pete shouted together. “Where did you find them, Jupe?”

The stout first investigator couldn’t help laughing. “I didn’t find them, I made them.”

“Made them? What do you mean you made them? You don’t look like an oyster to me!” Pete scoffed.

Jupiter scooped a handful of pearls into his fist and handed some to Bob and Pete. “When I finally deduced who was menacing us, I began to formulate a plan; which I’ll get to in a minute. The first step was to come up with some ghost pearls. Well, you both know as well as I that the last known ghost pearls were smashed in the cave at Verdant Valley. So I decided to make a set of clever forgeries. If you’ll observe the pearls in your hands, you’ll see that they are nothing more than smooth stones which I picked up from the salvage yard driveway and painted grey. The result is quite convincing don’t you think?”

“I’ll say,” said Bob. “You sure had me fooled. But how are we going to use them?”

“Correction,” said Jupe. “You mean how are Pete and I going to use them.”

“Oh yeah,” Bob said glumly. “I really hate to miss out on any of the action. It looks like it’ll have to be The Two Investigators for the rest of this case.”

“Don’t worry about it, Bob,” Jupe reassured. “I have a feeling there will be plenty for you to write up about this case after the

awards banquet tomorrow.”

“Are we going to use the stones to set a trap for Jensen?” Pete asked.

“Yes,” said Jupe. “We know that Jensen is a dangerous criminal who will do anything for money. So, let’s bait the trap with something priceless. Knowing that Mr. Won will pay an enormous amount of money, I believe Jensen won’t be able to resist the temptation. He’ll make a move for the pearls – and we’ll be there to nab him.”

“With the police, of course,” Pete added.

“Naturally,” Jupe agreed. “Jensen is much too dangerous to tackle by ourselves. I have no reservations about asking Chief Reynolds for his assistance in wrapping up this case.”

The stocky boy scooped up the faux gems and poured them back into their pouch.

“So what do we do now, First?” Pete asked.

“Now we must let it be known that we are in possession of the last remaining ghost pearls in the world. We’ll advise Chief Reynolds of our plan, and ask for his help in spreading the word. We can contact the local radio station and have them announce that The Three Investigators will be displaying some mementos from several of their cases – including the fabulous ghost pearls – at the Rotary benefit tomorrow.”

“My dad knows the publisher of Rocky Beach’s newspaper. I can ask him to run a late advertisement in today’s edition saying the ghost pearls will be on display,” said Bob.

Bob’s father was a lifelong newspaper man at a major publication in Los Angeles. He often took an interest in the boys cases and offered guidance whenever he could.

“An excellent suggestion, Records,” said Jupe. “And while

you're in bed you can also start a Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup telling kids to spread the word about the pearls to any adult who will listen."

The Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup was an operation devised by Jupiter in which each of the boys called five different friends and instructed them to be on the lookout for something or someone. Each of those five friends called another five friends and passed along the same message. Within a few hours The Three Investigators could have the whole population of Rocky Beach's kids on the lookout for clues!

"What about us, Jupe?" asked Pete. "Don't we have to do the Ghost-to-Ghost too?"

"We'll make our calls later. Right now you and I have to get out and spread the word about the pearls on our own."

"Why am I starting to get a sinking feeling?" Pete asked ominously.

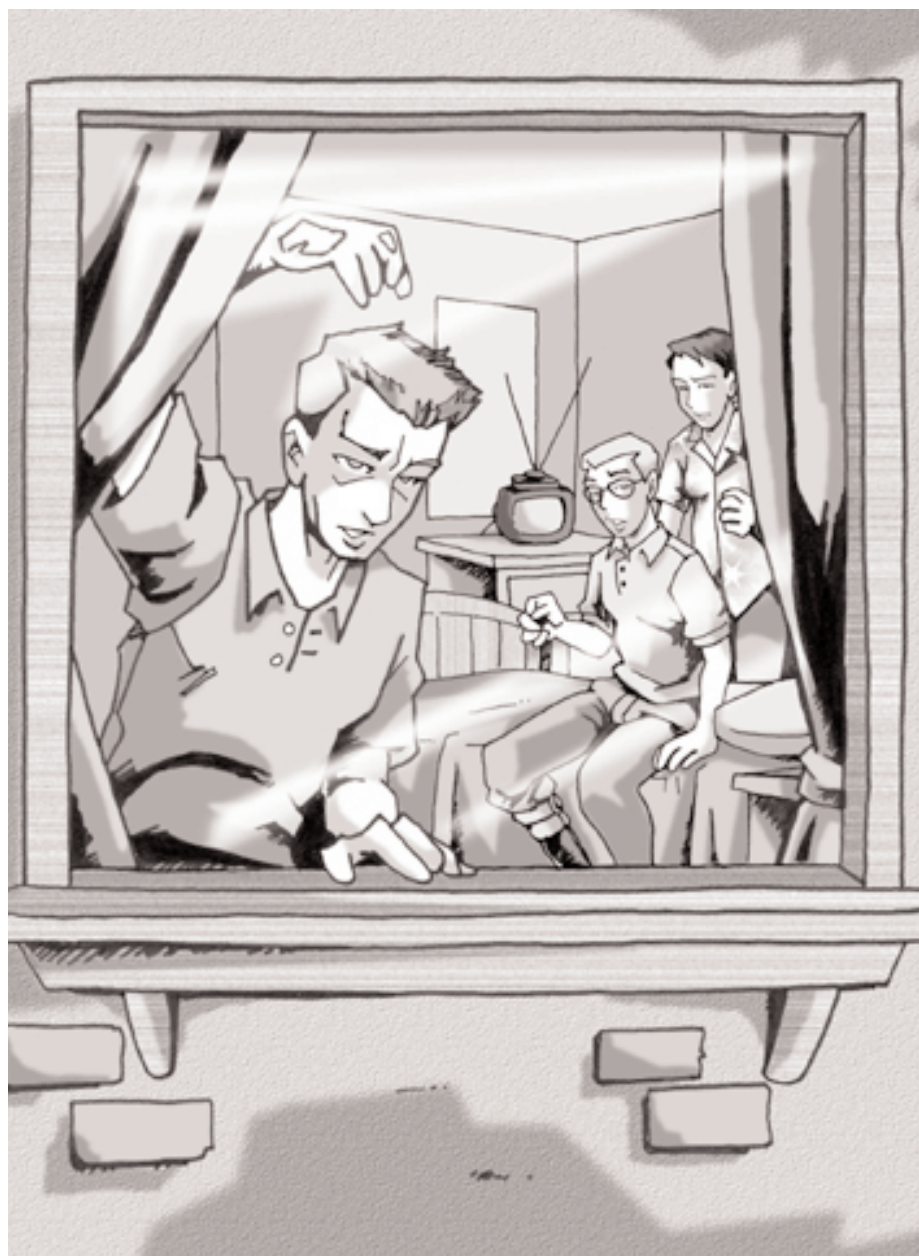
"I guess you know me pretty well," Jupe said with a grin. "We know that Jensen has us under surveillance – probably as we speak."

Pete gulped and parted the curtains, looking out the glass with a worried expression. "Don't worry, Pete," said Bob. "This is a pretty safe neighborhood, and I don't think he'd try anything during the day."

"Also," Jupe continued, "while we know he is watching us, we might as well let him hear us as well. Pete and I will go back to the salvage yard and wander around, trying to look busy. All the while we'll talk loudly about how excited we are for the banquet, and about the ghost pearls that will be on display."

Pete moaned. "Now I'm more worried than ever!"

"I assure you we'll be fine," said Jupe.



“Not about that,” Pete cried, “if we wander around the salvage yard we’re just asking to be put to work by Aunt Mathilda!”

The three friends all burst out laughing.

A short while later, after leaving Bob to make his phone calls, Jupe and Pete pulled their bicycles up to the front gates of the salvage yard.

“We’ll use the front entrance,” explained Jupe. “No sense giving away all of our secrets.”

“What am I supposed to say?” asked Pete.

“Just whatever comes to your mind. Talk loud, but naturally.”

“Easy enough for you to say,” sighed Pete. “You’ve got acting in your veins.”

For the next hour the two boys wandered about the salvage yard tidying up and speaking in raised voices about the ghost pearls. When Jupe was satisfied, he pulled Pete into the small cabin that served as an office and whispered into his ear.

“I think that is good enough. Now we can only wait for Jensen to make his move. I’ll contact Chief Reynolds and explain our plan. He should have his squad on full alert at tomorrow’s banquet, ready to nab Jensen when he goes for the pearls. Do you think you can make it home okay on your bicycle? Maybe we should ask Konrad to drive you home.”

“I’ll be okay,” whispered Pete.

Jupiter thought for a minute. “I’d feel better if you got out unseen. Why don’t you use Blue Gate Two and take the back way home to your house. Just to be on the safe side.”

Blue Gate Two was a secret entrance in the salvage yard fence located in the far corner of the yard behind the office. The outside fence was painted with a park scene of mothers in Victorian dress

and dainty umbrellas watching their children playing by a pond. The two boards of the secret gate were painted the bright blue of the sky. Because it was harder to get to without being seen by Aunt Mathilda, the boys seldom used it except in emergencies.

“I’ll call you when I get home,” said Pete.

“Affirmative. Don’t forget to make your calls for the Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup so we can get people talking about the ghost pearls. And don’t forget to be scrubbed and wearing your Sunday best tomorrow!”

“I won’t,” Pete whispered. The lanky boy sped his bicycle to the back of the lot and disappeared out Blue Gate Two, as Jupe went back into the office to make his own phone calls.

Just down the street Jensen and his Oriental henchman sat in an idling sedan. “Well, whattaya know – Ghost Pearls, eh Ping? Just as we were about to pull the last stunt and head out of town. What do you think about that?” he growled.

“Sounds like trap,” muttered Ping.

“Just what I was thinking,” Jensen agreed. “Still, I’d have enough money to live forever if I got my hands on those pearls – and we wouldn’t have to go through with the original plan of kidnapping the fat kid for ransom.”

“Sounds risky,” Ping said. “No way to get the pearls with all the police. We must have plan.”

“Oh, I’ve got a plan, Ping,” sneered Jensen. “I’ve definitely got a plan.”

14

The Trap Is Sprung

EARLY THE next morning, Bob awoke and hobbled downstairs to the kitchen where his mother was cooking up a big breakfast of omelets.

“Good morning, Robert,” she sang. “Hurry and eat your breakfast. You’ve got to allow yourself extra time to get ready now that you have that awful cast again.”

Bob’s father was enjoying his Saturday ritual of the newspaper, his pipe, and plenty of coffee. He put down his paper and smiled at Bob.

“So today’s the big day?”

“Yes,” Bob said eagerly. “Jupe hopes to solve the case today.”

“Case?” his father said, perplexed. “I was talking about the banquet.”

“Oh, yeah,” Bob shrugged, grinning. “That’s today, too.”

“You boys aren’t cooking up some scheme, are you?” His father asked suspiciously.

His mother set a plate in front of Bob and poured him some orange juice. “I wouldn’t put it past Jupiter Jones. He did find my wedding ring, but sometimes that boy is too smart for his own good,” she said; shaking her head as if to prove her point. “Now eat up, Robert. I’ll lay out your clothes on the bed.”

A short time later there were three loud honks from out in front of Bob’s house. Bob peered out the window and saw the magnificent gold plated Rolls Royce purring like a lion at the curb. He hobbled out the front door with his new crutches.

Worthington jumped out of the car and raced around to the other side so that he might open the door for Bob.

“Thanks, Worthington.”

“You’re quite welcome, Master Andrews. Incidentally, I shall be delighted if I can be of any assistance in solving your latest case. The car will be in front of the Rotary Club, ready to go at a moments notice.”

Bob smiled as he climbed in to the plush interior of the Rolls. “I don’t know what we’d do without you, Worthington.”

Minutes later the sleek car glided to the front of the Jones Salvage Yard. Jupe and Pete were standing by the front gates, practically gleaming from the application of soap and stiff brushes. Their hair was neatly parted and they wore their best Sunday clothes. Bob could see that Jupiter was also holding his napsack.

“More cookies and soda, Jupe?” he asked as the two boys climbed into the back of the car.

“If Jensen makes his move I want to be ready,” the stout boy proclaimed. “Here’s our walkie-talkies, homing devices, and chalk. They’ll be on display but we will be able to snatch them up at any time if Jensen goes for the pearls.”

“I think he’d be crazy to make a move at the banquet,” Pete snorted. “The place will be crawling with police!”

“I have deduced that Jensen will be counting on that very fact,” Jupe replied.

“You mean he might be posing as one of Chief Reynolds men?” Bob asked.

“It’s a distinct possibility. I plan on alerting the chief as soon as we arrive to be on the lookout for an impostor police officer.”

Worthington cleared his throat. “Pardon me, lads. I shall have to remain with the car, as it is my duty. However, I will keep a

keen eye open for any suspicious activity outside of the Rotary Club building.”

“If it’s not too much trouble, I’d like you to come into the banquet for a bit, Worthington. I know there’s a lot of people that would like to meet the “unofficial fourth investigator,” Jupe said.

Worthington smiled. “Perhaps I could leave the car for a minute. Long enough for a bit of tea and a biscuit.”

The boys all smiled. Worthington’s proper English ways were often in sharp contrast to the colorful personalities of Southern California.

A few moments later Worthington spoke up. “We have arrived, and I should be honored if you would allow me to assist with the door,” Worthington said.

“Of course, Worthington. That would make a fine entrance.” Jupe replied.

A short time later the boys sat at the table of honor to the right of the podium. Leo Magellan, the stodgy museum director, sat at a table to the left and eyed Pete suspiciously.

Pete elbowed Jupe. “I think he recognizes me,” he gasped.

“Relax, Pete,” Jupe whispered. “You did nothing wrong. By the end of the day I hope to prove it!”

The banquet honoring their community service and the presentation of the check went off without a hitch. The pearls remained in a glass case on a table in the center of the room along with mementos from many of the boys’ other cases. Jupe practically squirmed right out of his chair with anticipation.

“I don’t understand,” he sighed. “I was certain Jensen would have made some kind of move by now. The banquet is nearly over. Let’s mingle a little and see if we can spot him.”

The boys left their seats. Pete helped Bob down the steps of

the small stage and they disappeared into the large crowd that was milling about the room.

Just then there was a loud crash from the direction of the kitchen. Jupe pushed in that direction and tried to locate Pete and Bob in the crowd. Now yelling and screaming could be heard coming from the other side of the swinging kitchen doors.

Everyone in the crowd turned to see what all the fuss was about. Jupe could see Chief Reynolds talking into his walkie talkie – at least he was on alert! Suddenly the kitchen doors burst open and Jupe went sprawling to the floor. The head chef for the catering service was reprimanding a careless employee.

“You fool! You’ve broken a thousand dollars in fine china!”

“It wasn’t me,” the waiter insisted. “I was pushed!”

“Hah! Pushed,” the chef sneered. “Like the last time you were ‘pushed’ too, eh? Well, no more! You’re fired!”

“But... but...” the waiter stammered.

Jupiter jumped to his feet. This was it – he knew a diversion when he saw it. He quickly glanced about the room searching for Bob and Pete. They were lost somewhere in the sea of people – and the walkie-talkies were on the other side of the room.

The First Investigator thought fast. There was only one thing to do. Quick as a cat, Jupe slipped passed the irate cook and snuck into the kitchen.

Several employees had stopped their duties to watch the spectacle and barely seemed to notice him. Jupe surveyed all their faces, looking for Jensen. He was not in the kitchen. Jupe strode quickly to the rear service entrance and peered out the back door into the parking lot that was behind the Rotary Club.

There wasn’t a soul in the parking lot; only a few white vans from the catering service. Jupe turned to go back to the dining

room when something caught his eye. Three of the white vans were gleaming white as if brand new. But the fourth one was older and dented up – peppered with rust spots, just like the van that Bob had described as that of the kidnappers!

Jupe made a calculated decision to check it out on his own and eased out the back door.

He stepped out into the bright sunshine and squinted his eyes. No one was around, now was his chance! The round investigator hustled over to the mis-matched van and cautiously peered in the windows.

It was empty.

Without wasting any time, Jupe threw open the back doors of the van.

His jaw dropped.

The back of the dingy white van was crammed with priceless artwork and Oriental treasures! Jupe could see delicate tapestries, handsome hand-carved wooden chests, priceless vases and other rare antiquities. There must be a million dollars worth of stolen treasure here, he thought to himself.

Suddenly he heard shouting and the sound of running feet. Jupe looked around for a place to hide. There was only one place to go and he knew it – inside the van!

On instinct, he traced a large “?” into the grimy dirt that caked the side of the van. And without a second thought, Jupe jumped into the back of the van and slammed the doors shut, just as Jensen and Ping raced around the corner of the Rotary Club.

Jupe gulped and looked around the back of the van for a hiding place. The chest! It looked just big enough for a boy – if there was nothing in it! Jupe whipped the lid open and breathed a sigh of relief. It was empty. He quickly jumped inside and shut the lid,

and not a second too soon.

Jensen and Ping tore open the doors to the van and Jupe heard the auto roar to life. Then he heard other voices. It was Bob and Pete and Chief Reynolds! Jupe smiled to himself as the van lurched and rocked about. They would follow the van and finally put Jensen behind bars, where he belonged.

But just as quickly, Jupe's smile turned into a frown when he heard Jensen and Ping talking. "Pushing that creep holding all the plates worked like a charm," Jensen laughed.

"But those darn kids still noticed you breaking the glass case and stealing the pearls. You should have been more careful," he warned. "Well, that can't be helped. I guess all we have to do now is ditch the van, load all of this stuff into the real get-away truck, and we're home free!"

"Will Won pay top dollar?"

"Of course he will. He claims this stuff is rightfully his anyway. We're rich, Ping! Now all we have to do is get to San Francisco without being caught by the cops!"

Back in the trunk, Jupe's heart raced and he broke out in a cold sweat.

Won? San Francisco?

Jupe gulped. He was in deep trouble and there wasn't a thing he could do about it!

15

A Tight Squeeze

“HAS ANYONE seen Jupiter Jones?” Chief Reynolds shouted.

A state of confusion had fallen over the crowd at the Rotary. Guests milled about the grounds discussing the robbery and re-creating the scene as it happened. The chief shouted again.

“Has anyone here seen Jupiter Jones?”

Many in the crowd shook their heads, others went back to their stories, which grew more sensational by the minute. The chief shook his head and looked to Bob and Pete. “The last time I saw Jones was when the kitchen doors knocked him to the floor. That was about five minutes ago – he couldn’t have gotten very far in five minutes.”

“Remember, we’re talking about Jupiter Jones here,” Pete said worriedly. “He could be in Mexico by now for all we know!”

“I almost wouldn’t put it past Jones,” the chief sighed.

Bob hobbled on his crutches over to the spot where Jensen’s van had been parked. “Do you think your squad cars will be able to catch up with Jensen, chief?”

“I’ve put out an All Points Bulletin for all of Rocky Beach and the surrounding counties, including Los Angeles. My men will be pulling over every white van they see – we’ll catch him, Bob.”

Just then Pete spoke up. “Chief, I just had a thought. What if Jupe was hiding inside the van when Jensen and his pal took off. Golly, he could be in real trouble if they find him!”

The chief looked worried. “It’s just like Jones to try something like that. I better get on the radio and tell my men to be extra cau-

tious. That van might have a stowaway on board.”

Inside the ornamental trunk, Jupiter Jones was breathing heavy and his legs were beginning to cramp. He calculated the distance to San Francisco from Rocky Beach, the time it would take to cover that distance, and bit his lip.

He didn't know if he could hold out that long trapped in his hiding place. He finally decided he would have to risk at least opening the lid so he might get some fresh air.

Just as he was about to crack open the lid of the chest, the van came to a sudden halt. Doors slammed and Jupe heard the sounds of grunting and shuffling feet as Jensen and Ping began transferring their stolen treasures from the van into the back of their get-away truck.

When they got to the trunk that he was in, Jupe held his breath. It was lifted several inches and then dropped heavily onto the floor of the van with a thud.

“I thought this thing was empty,” Jensen complained. “Must have filled it with gold,” he snickered.

“Maybe we should open it,” said Ping.

“No time,” replied Jensen. “We gotta be in San Francisco in an hour. Come on now... heave!”

Jupe felt the trunk lift into the air. He braced himself for the crash that was sure to follow when it was deposited into the back of the truck. Jensen and Ping threw it down with a teeth-jarring jolt.

After several trips, the two crooks had emptied the van. Jupe heard the large sliding door of the moving truck slam closed and the engine roar to life. He was on his way to San Francisco – whether he liked it or not!

Back at the Rotary Club in Rocky Beach, Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw sat listlessly, waiting for word that the white van had been found and their friend rescued.

When an hour had passed, Pete stood up and began to pace. "If only Jupe had grabbed a walkie-talkie we'd be able to find out where he is!"

"Try not to worry, Pete," Chief Reynolds muttered. "There are a lot of people looking for Jupiter right now. We'll find him."

"If only it's not too late," added Bob. "We've dealt with Jensen before and know what he's capable of. If he finds out that Jupe is hiding out in the back of that van..."

Bob's voice trailed off. They all understood very well what would happen if Jensen found Jupe.

Just then, the radio in the chief's cruiser crackled to life. "Chief Reynolds, come in. Over." The chief snatched up the microphone in a flash. "This is the chief, what have you found?"

"We've located the van. It's been abandoned in the foothills just a few miles north of town. It was hidden in an arroyo, covered with chaparral. Over."

"I'm on my way. Over and out." Chief Reynolds jumped into his car. "Come on boys, let's go!"

Bob and Pete scrambled into the cruiser. The chief turned on his lights and siren and drove as fast as he dared toward the foothills of the coastal mountains. Pete and Bob held on tight as the roads narrowed and then turned from pavement to gravel. But they didn't have to worry, Chief Reynolds was an expert driver and handled the hairpin curves like a master.

When they arrived at the dry, arid arroyo after the wild ride, there was very little for them to see. The battered white van stood silent and empty.

Pete and Bob inspected the vehicle inside and out.

“There’s a lot of footprints near the back of the van,” said Bob. “It looks like Jensen and another man, probably the Oriental that nabbed me, moved something from the van to another vehicle. Look over here,” he continued, following the footprints in the dirt. “Another set of tire tracks. Jensen must have had a second getaway car stashed up here.”

“These tracks are wider,” said Chief Reynolds. “I’d say they had a get-away truck.”

“But what did they move from the back of the van?” Pete said nervously. “And how will we find out when we don’t even know what kind of truck we’re looking for?”

In the back of the moving truck, Jupe heaved at the lid of the ornamental trunk. It barely budged. Jensen must have placed something heavy on top.

Jupe was trying to remain calm, but the thought of being trapped inside the trunk for another hour was enough to get him moving. He pushed with his shoulder with all his might and opened the lid enough to get his head and left arm out.

He craned his head around and saw what was holding the lid closed. It was a large marble statue of a tiger. Jupe pushed once more and got his other arm out. Now he was almost there.

Sucking in his belly, the First Investigator lurched forward and tumbled to the floor. The oversized statue rocked precariously on the chest, threatening to topple over. Jupe leaped up to hold the tiger steady. He didn’t want to give away his hiding place any sooner than he had to.

The back of the truck was pitch black, the only light that Jupe could see came from a vent high up on the far wall.

He blindly picked his way through the stolen antiques and shimmied up a rolled-up rug until his face was pressed close to the dusty vent. On the other side he could see Jensen behind the wheel. He was talking to his partner.

“I figure we got about a million dollars worth of stuff in this truck, Ping. Getting that job as a security guard at the museum was almost too easy!” he laughed. “All that stuff in boxes and crates in the basement of the museum just waiting to go on display... they won’t even know it’s gone for another week, just like Won said.”

“How much for the pearls?” asked Ping.

“Seems to me we can pretty much set our price for these babies.” Jupiter could see Jensen holding up the bag of fake pearls. “Maybe another million on top of the first. Who knows?”

Jupe could hear the two crooks laughing as he slid down the rug.

He set about marking the trunk and the door of the truck with question marks with his chalk. He didn’t know if it would do any good, but it kept his mind from thinking about the fact that soon he would have to climb back inside the box. It also kept his mind from thinking about what Jensen and Ping would do when they actually arrived in San Francisco and found him in the back of the truck.

Before long Jupe could feel the truck slowing down and making frequent turns. He sighed, knowing it was time for him to get back inside the ornamental trunk.

Getting in with the marble statue on the lid proved slightly easier than getting out, but Jupe still had to struggle to squeeze his bulky frame in. Minutes after he was back inside, the truck came to a halt and the engine turned off. Jupe heard the back door slide

open and Jensen and Ping moving about.

Jupe had spent his time in the trunk formulating a plan, and he figured he would have to remain hidden in the trunk until dark, then make a break for it when he was sure everyone had left Won's hideout. It wasn't much, but it was all he could think of.

Now it was time for Jupe's trunk to be moved. He could hear Jensen and Ping cursing as they struggled with the weight of it. When they finally set it down, Jupe heard a familiar voice speak.

It was the mysterious Mr. Won.

"What is the meaning of this?" Won asked sharply.

"What do you mean?" Jensen snarled. "That's all of it, just like you asked."

"I do not speak of the treasures, you fool," the ancient man hissed. "I speak of the treasure within the treasure."

Inside the box, Jupiter gulped and held his breath.

"You'll have to stop talking in riddles, Won. You're not making any sense," Jensen snorted.

"Open the last chest and reveal what is hidden to ignorant eyes," replied Won.

"Suit yourself," Jensen grunted.

The lid of the chest was slowly raised, and a disheveled, slightly sheepish Jupiter Jones rose out of it.

16

The Death of 1,000 Cuts

JUPITER JONES stepped out of the ornamental trunk and was roughly seized by Ping. Jensen stood with his mouth open and looked from Mr. Won to the trunk and then back to Mr. Won.

“How did you know he was in there?”

Mr. Won’s eyes narrowed behind his gold-rimmed spectacles and he shook his head in disgust. “When you have lived as long as I have, you learn there are many ways of seeing other than through the eyes.”

Jupe surveyed the interior of Mr. Won’s large, circular room. It was just as Bob and Pete had described it to him when they had been there tackling the mystery of the Green Ghost.

The walls were still covered with thick, red velvet drapes, each with elaborate scenes of dragons and warriors sewn in gold thread. At the front of the room was Mr. Won’s massive armchair; intricately carved from black wood and luxuriously padded with thick velvet cushions. Mr. Won himself wore red robes of the ancient Chinese noblemen that flowed to the floor. He rose from the great chair and pointed a spindly finger at Jupe.

“Come closer, boy,” he said in a thin but firm voice.

Jupe took several steps forward and stood before Mr. Won, trying very hard to appear braver than he really felt.

“It is good to be frightened,” Mr. Won said, as if reading his mind. “It tells me you respect my power.” Jupe stood quietly, his mind racing, trying to figure a way out of his predicament. “However, as I was once lenient with your friends, I cannot prom-

ise the same for you.”

He took a step closer to Jupe. “You prove to be a nuisance, round one.”

Jupe bristled at the reference to his weight. Even in the most dangerous situation, he couldn't help being overly sensitive about his stocky build. He was about to say something when Mr. Won continued.

“You have seen and heard too much. As you now know, I have spent a lifetime acquiring and returning the glorious riches of the Won Dynasty to their rightful owners. I am the oldest living descendant of the Won Dynasty of ancient China. The riches you see before you belong to my venerable family, not tucked away in museums.”

Jupe gulped and looked about the room. Ping stepped up close behind him as if sensing that Jupe might bolt for the door at any moment. Mr. Won waved him off.

“Round one knows there is no escape, Ping. He will not try anything as foolish as running, yes?”

Jupe nodded slowly and looked down at his shoes.

He had remembered what Bob and Pete had said about Mr. Won's hypnotic powers, and he reminded himself to be wary of it.

Mr. Won continued talking as he paced to and fro in front of Jupe. “You, of course, have nothing to offer me which I do not already possess, so bargaining for your life seems pointless.”

Suddenly an idea popped into Jupe's head. “I have more ghost pearls,” he blurted out. “Not many, but enough to keep you alive for at least a few more years.”

Won stopped pacing and peered intently at Jupe. “I can easily look into your mind to see if this is true, round one. Do not try to deceive me.”

“You don’t have to read my mind,” Jupe said quickly. “Just look in the bag that Jensen has in his pocket.”

Mr. Won’s eyes narrowed again as he sat back down in his massive chair. “Seize him,” he said quietly.

Before Jensen could move a finger, his arms were grabbed from behind by two loyal servants of Mr. Won. It seemed to Jupe that they appeared right out of the folds of the draperies.

Jensen fought and snorted like a bull, but even his enormous strength was no match for the iron grip of Won’s men.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Jensen raged. “Did you think I was going to *give* them to you? There’s a price for everything, you know!”

His face had turned as red as a beet and he thrashed about, cursing.

Mr. Won sat patiently until Jensen had finished with his tirade. “I have had enough of your bungling to fill two lifetimes. Because of your foolishness, we now have the boy inserted into an already complex equation,” Won seethed. “The pearls, please.”

Another servant appeared from the draperies and searched Jensen pockets as the big man struggled. The servant pulled out Jupe’s small marble bag and handed it over to Mr. Won.

“You are courageous and quick-witted, round one,” Mr. Won said quietly, his tongue greedily licking his lips. “Perhaps you have bought your freedom after all.”

Mr. Won reached into the deep cushions of his chair and brought out a very small glass bottle filled with a clear liquid. He reached into Jupe’s marble bag and brought out a “Ghost Pearl.” “If this is truly a pearl of life, you shall have your freedom – provided you turn over the rest of the pearls in your possession. A fair deal, make no mistake. However, if this is a trick, you shall fall

victim to the death of one thousand cuts. Also quite fair.”

Jupe’s heart sank. He hadn’t counted on Mr. Won testing one of the pearls. But before he could object, Mr. Won dropped the rock into the small bottle, where it fell to the bottom with a “plink.”

When it did not dissolve, Mr. Won glared at Jupe. “Look into my eyes, small one, and see your death.”

Jupe was shoved forward by Mr. Won’s servants, their grip on his his arms like bands of steel. As he tried to avert his eyes from Won’s penetrating gaze, his heart raced and beads of sweat broke out on his forehead.

He would never see his Aunt Mathilda or Uncle Titus again. And what about Pete and Bob? What would they do without him? There were so many people he would never get to say goodbye to. Chief Reynolds... Hans and Konrad... Worthington...

With a mighty crash, the thick oak door of Mr. Won’s hideout came thundering down, as the tall, English chauffeur barreled into the room!

“Worthington!” shouted Jupiter.

He was followed by several policemen who quickly drew their guns. There was a moment of utter chaos as many of Mr. Won’s servants darted for the secret exits buried deep within the draperies. The police caught as many as they could, but they had their hands full battling with Jensen and Ping, who nearly got away before a warning shot was fired into the ceiling from one of the officers.

Worthington spotted Jupe and raced to his aid.

“Unhand him, you fiends!” he commanded bravely, fighting off Won’s servants with Judo moves that surprised a wide-eyed



Jupe. The boys had known Worthington for a long time, but none of them had known he took an interest in the martial arts.

Won's men were no match for the lanky chauffeur. They fled for the door – right into the arms of the police.

“Are you injured, Master Jones? You're not harmed?”

“I'm fine, Worthington,” Jupe sighed in relief. “But how did you find me?”

The tall driver picked his cap up from the floor and straightened his neck-tie. “Let us get you to safety and I shall explain everything to the last detail.”

“Wait a minute, Worthington,” Jupe said. “There is one person I want to make sure doesn't get away this time.”

Throughout the confusion, Mr. Won had sat serenely in his oversized black chair. Now, Jupe and Worthington saw him calmly raise a hinged cushion on one of the chair's arm-rests, and push a glowing red button hidden beneath.

To their amazement, the entire platform that Mr. Won's chair sat upon began to silently rotate – and within seconds he was gone, with nothing but a curtained wall in his place. Jupe heard a heavy “CLANK” from the other side of the wall when it had finished rotating. He deduced it was probably some kind of large locking mechanism. It would take a long time to get through that wall.

Enough time, Jupe guessed, for Mr. Won to make a clean getaway.

Again.

17

Mr. Crowe Makes A Deal

A WEEK AFTER Jupe's close call in San Francisco, The Three Investigators called on John Crowe in his big office at home in Santa Barbara. The famous mystery novelist carefully read Bob's notes of the case, and then set them down on his massive desk.

"A tough case, cracked!" he grinned. "I congratulate you on finally putting that rascal Jensen behind bars."

"Thank you, sir," Jupe said without a hint of smugness.

"Of course," the author said thoughtfully, "it was not your most professional case by any means."

Jupe's face began to turn a faint shade of red. The great writer shot Bob and Pete a malicious wink. "In fact, young Jones, it seems luck and happenstance played a somewhat larger role in this case than sound logic and deduction."

Jupe squirmed in his chair. "I thought you might say that, sir. Which is why I was reluctant to ask you to introduce this case."

Mr. Crowe chuckled and shook his head at Jupe's sudden case of modesty. "Well," he said, "any mental capacity or reasoning that was lacking from this case was made up for with sheer bravery and courage." Crowe's eyes gleamed as he bridged his fingers in front of his nose. "However, courage can sometimes be interpreted as foolishness, such as when you took the risk of hiding inside that trunk. What of that? "

"A calculated risk," Pete declared. "And it all worked out okay in the end. Jensen and Ping are behind bars on kidnapping charges and theft, and Mr. Won's stolen treasure has been

returned to all the museums that he had burglarized.”

“Ah yes,” Mr. Crowe nodded. “The elusive Mr. Won. Dare I ask how in the world he knew you were inside the trunk?”

Jupiter frowned in indignation. He felt Mr. Crowe was having too much fun at his expense. “I really don’t have an explanation for that, sir,” he said lamely.

Bob spoke up to get Jupe off the hook. “We can only guess that after living for over a hundred years, he has somehow fine-tuned his senses so they are much sharper than the average person’s.”

“An excellent thought, Master Andrews,” the famous writer agreed. “And one worth considering further. Can one actually exercise his or her mind to see what others cannot? There might be a novel in that! Regardless, I would like to know if this intriguing character, Mr. Won, reappears. And, if so, let us hope he holds no grudge against The Three Investigators as Jensen did. Speaking of Jensen, how did his story play out after the conclusion of the Green Ghost mystery?”

Bob fielded this question. “That is probably the most amazing coincidence in the case! According to Jensen’s statement to the police, after he escaped from Hash Knife Canyon he made his way out to the southeast coast.

“Apparently he had some criminal friends running a fishing boat smuggling ring several miles from the town of Fishingport in the Atlantic Bay. One day he happened to read in the local newspaper about three boys who helped recover the missing treasure of Captain One-Ear.” Bob was referring, of course, to the boy’s exciting adventure in unraveling the secret of Skeleton Island some time before.

“Thunderation!” exclaimed Mr. Crowe. “Strange coincidence,

indeed! I can almost imagine his utter astonishment. He must have felt there was no escaping The Three Investigators, even when one has traveled to the other side of the continent!”

“So anyway,” Pete said, picking up where Bob had left off, “that really got his blood boiling and he started to plan on how he could get revenge. He knew that he would eventually end up back in California – the jobs he pulled for Mr. Won paid too much for him to stay away for very long. So he bided his time and waited for the day when he could safely return to the west coast – and begin working for Won again while also carrying out his plan against us. He couldn’t believe his luck when one of Won’s first assignments was the Rocky Beach museum!”

Now Jupe joined in. “The first thing he did was bring Ping into his scheme. His plan was too big to do by himself, and he knew he’d need help in pulling it off. Ping was a worker at Verdant Valley who was secretly helping Jensen stir up trouble for the Green family. Next he used false identification papers to get a job at the museum where the shipment of antiquities from the Won Dynasty was scheduled to be delivered.”

“If I am not mistaken, that leaves just one last question that has not been answered,” said Mr. Crowe.

“How did Worthington find me?” said Jupe.

“Precisely,” agreed the writer.

Jupe took a deep breath and began explaining. “After Worthington came inside the Rotary Club for tea, he immediately returned to the Rolls Royce which was parked in front of the building.”

“Ever the professional chauffeur,” remarked Mr. Crowe.

“And it was that professionalism that saved Jupe!” Bob chimed in.

“It just so happened,” Jupe continued, “that the van had to take an alleyway that ran along the side of the building, and then pass directly in front of where Worthington was parked out front. He grew suspicious when the van sped out of the parking lot in such a hurry, and, when he saw my question mark chalked on the side, he new that he should give chase. He decided to tail it on his own and then call us on the car phone when he found out where it was going.”

“A decision that proved to be most beneficial to you, Master Jones.”

Jupe nodded his head. “Worthington followed the van until it went into the hills outside Rocky Beach. He had to keep a safe distance away, as the Rolls is easily spotted, and he nearly lost us when the van failed to come out of a dead-end – as you know, a truck came out instead.

“Putting two and two together, he began following the truck – all the way to San Francisco. That was when he remembered he was going to use the phone. Since he didn’t know the number of the Rotary Club – and Bob, Pete, and Chief Reynolds were too far away to do anything anyway, he decided to call information and find out the number of the San Francisco Police Department. He then explained the whole story and kept them on the phone until the van came to the parking garage of a building that, as it turned out, was owned by Mr. Won.”

Bob picked up the story from here. “Worthington then took a big risk by leaving the Rolls Royce and following Jensen and Ping to the elevator to see which floor they were getting off on. He then went back to the car and waited for the police to arrive. Then, having one officer guard the Rolls Royce, he and several other officers entered the building. They took the elevator, and,

since there is only one door on that particular level, they knew they had them trapped. When they heard Won threatening Jupe, they decided to act!”

Pete couldn't stand it any longer. “Now that's everything!” he blurted out. “Will you introduce the case, sir?”

John Crowe chuckled with another malicious gleam in his eye. “As a writer, I have the luxury of writing several drafts of any particular scene until I have achieved the desired affect. As investigators you do not have that luxury. You must think quickly and are allowed only one chance, sometimes in a perilous situation. With that in mind, I think you performed admirably in the face of great danger, even if your deductive powers were not on great display.”

The Three Investigators sat on the edge of their seats, holding their breath.

“So, against my better judgement, I will declare this case closed and agree to introduce it.”

The boys glowed at Mr. Crowe's approval, but the great author wasn't finished.

“On one condition!”

“And what is that, sir?” Jupe asked.

John Crowe sat back in his chair, looking quite pleased with himself. “Since this was anything but a typical Three Investigators case – and we are all agreed that it was not solved in the, er, most fastidious manner – I will agree to introduce this case only if you agree to publish it online, that is to say, over the internet, so that all the fans that hang on your every word can see that even the fantastic Three Investigators are not completely infallible. Is that acceptable?”

Jupe quickly regained his composure and sat up straight. “I

think that is a fine idea, sir. We had discussed using our prize money to get a computer for headquarters anyway.”

“There goes Magic Mountain...” Pete sighed.

“Yeah,” said Bob, “and there goes my new bike. Looks like we got out-voted one to two again!”

They all laughed, but then Jupe grew serious. “We promise to publish this story online, and I promise to learn from my mistakes on this case and never let them happen again.”

The great novelist roared with laughter. “You’re too hard on yourself, young Jones. Be content that you put a known criminal behind bars and returned a fortune to the museums. That is more than many detectives can hope to achieve in a lifetime of work!”

The three boys smiled graciously at their mentor and thanked him as they left. Alone, John Crowe began scribbling notes for his introduction of The Three Investigators latest case, and wondered what kind of thrilling adventure the young lads would find themselves in next.

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

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