

THE MYSTERY OF THE TALKING SKULL

Chapter 1

started Jupiter Buys a Mystery Trunk [
~~happened~~

It all ~~started~~ because Jupiter Jones read the newspaper.

The Three Investigators--Jupiter, Pete Crenshaw, and Bob Andrews--were taking it easy back in Jupe's workshop section of The Jones Salvage Yard. Bob was writing up some notes~~x~~ on their last case. Pete was just enjoying the California morning sunshine. And Jupiter was reading the paper.

Presently he looked up from its pages.

"Have either of you ever been to an auction?" he asked.

Bob said no. Pete shook his head.

"Neither have I," Jupiter said. "~~I think it might be interest-~~
~~ing experience.~~" The paper says there's to be an auction this morning
at the Davis Auction Company in Hollywood. They'll be auctioning off

to the highest bidder unclaimed luggage from a number of hotels.
The paper says there are trunks ^{and} suitcases with unknown contents,
left behind by people who moved, or couldn't pay their bill,
or who just forgot to call for them. I think it might be inter-
esting to visit an auction."

"Why?" Pete asked, ~~and yawned.~~ "I'm happy here."

"I don't need a suitcase full of somebody's old clothes."

"Neither do I," Bob said. "Let's go swimming."

"We should seek out new experiences," Jupiter said.

"Every new experience helps broaden our background as investigators.
An auction will be a new experience. I'll see if Uncle Titus will
let Hans drive us up to Hollywood in the light truck."

And so, an hour later, they were standing in a large,
hot room ~~quite~~ crowded with people, watching a ^{shot} plump auction-
eer on a raised platform auction off trunks and suitcases as
rapidly as possible. At the moment he had a new-looking ^{suitcase} ~~trunk~~ in
front of him, and was trying to get one more bid on it.

THE MYSTERY OF THE AUCTION TRUNK

by

Robert

Arthur

CHAPTER 1

restarted.

"Going once! Going once!" *restarted.* "Going twice! Going ~~Twice~~....Gone!

Sold for twelve dollars and fifty cents.

with is the red tie *to the gentleman*

The short, stout auctioneer banged his gavel, signifying that the sale was final. He had just sold a good-looking suitcase to a man wearing a red tie. Then he turned to see what came next.

"Now we come to lot 98!" *he* the auctioneer sang out. "A very interesting item, ladies and gentlemen. Interesting and unusual. Hoist ^{it} up where everyone can see it, boys."

Two sturdy workmen lifted a small, old-fashioned trunk with a rounded top onto the platform. Pete stirred restlessly. It was a hot day and the room was stuffy. Some of the men present~~x~~ seemed quite interested in bidding on the unknown contents of the luggage that was being put up for sale, but Pete couldn't have cared less.

"C'mon, Jupe, let's go!" Pete muttered to his stocky companion.

"Just a little longer, ~~Pete,~~" Jupe whispered back. "This looks like an interesting item. I think I'll bid on it."

"On that?" Pete stared at the trunk. "You're crazy."

"Just the same, I think I'll try to buy it. If it's worth anything we'll all share."

"Worth anything? It's probably full of clothes that went out of style in 1890," Bob said, joining the conversation.

The trunk indeed looked old. It was smaller than a regular trunk, made of wood, with leather straps and leather binding, and had a round^{ed} top ~~to it~~. It was stoutly locked.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the auctioneer shouted. "I invite your attention to this fine trunk. Believe me, folks, they don't make trunks like this one any more!"

A snicker went through the ~~crowd~~^{crowd}. It was certainly true no one made trunks ^{any more} like the old-fashioned one they were looking at, ~~any more~~. The trunk could easily have been fifty years old ~~or more~~.

"I think it's an old actor's trunk," Jupe whispered to his two companions. "The kind actors touring in plays used to take with them to keep their costumes in ~~it~~. ~~It may be full of old costumes.~~"

"One thing we don't need is a bunch of old costumes," Pete muttered back. "For gosh sake, Jupe--"

But the auctioneer² was already shouting his sales talk ~~to the crowd.~~²

"Look at it, ladies and gentlemen, look at it!" he cried. "Not new, not modern, no indeed. But think of it as an antique. Think of it as a fond memento of grandfather's day. And what may be in it?"

He rapped the trunk with his knuckle^s and it gave off a hollow sound.

"Who knows what it holds? ~~Perhaps some antique~~ It might hold anything. Why folks, the crown jewels of the former Czars of old Russia might be in that trunk. I don't guarantee it, but certainly the possibility can't be denied. Now what am I bid? Give me an offer, someone. Give me an offer."

The crowd was silent. Apparently no one wanted an old, out-dated trunk, ~~and no one took the humorous remark about the Russian crown jewels seriously.~~ The auctioneer looked annoyed.

"Come on, folks!" he implored. "Give me a bid! Let's get this started. This fine old, antique trunk, this precious relic of yesterday, this----"

He was just getting wound up in his talk, when Jupiter Jones took a step forward.

"One dollar!" he called, his voice squeaking slightly with excitement, ~~for it was the first time he had ever made a bid at an auction.~~

"One dollar!" the auction^{er} interrupted himself to shout.

"I have one dollar from ^{that} intelligent looking young man in the first row. And you know what I'm going to do, folks? I'm going to reward his intelligence by selling it to him for one dollar!"
Sold ^{to} ~~to the young man for one dollar.~~

And he brought his gavel down hard to show the sale was final^l. The crowd chuckled. No^one else had wanted the trunk, and the auction^{er} had realized it so he hadn't waste^d time trying to get any more bids. ^{He} had made a fast sale of the old trunk, and now Jupiter Jones^{was} the ^{somewhat} ~~slightly~~ surprised owner of one ~~slightly~~ antique trunk, tightly locked, contents unknown.

At that moment, however, there was a stir in the back of the ~~crowd~~ ^{woman}. A ~~man~~ was trying to push his way through---a ^{a little old} ~~rather thin man~~ lady with white hair, an old-fashioned hat, and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Wait a minute!" she called ~~desperately~~. "I want to bid. Ten dollars! I bid ten dollars for the trunk!"

Heads turned~~x~~ to look at ^{her} ~~him~~. People ^{seemed} ~~looked~~ surprised at anyone wanting to pay ten dollars for such an old trunk, and ~~interested because the auctioner had sold it for only one dollar.~~

"Twenty dollars!" the white^{woman} haired ~~man~~ called ~~eagerly~~, waving ^{her} ~~his~~ hand. "I'll bid twenty dollars!"

"I'm sorry, ^{madam,} ~~sir,~~" the auction^{er} called back. "The article has been sold and ^{all} sales are final. Take it away, ^{men} ~~boys~~, take it away. We have to get on with the sale."

The two workmen lifted the trunk down from the platform, swinging it toward The Three Investigators.

"Here you are, boys," one said. Pete and Jupiter stepped forward.

"Well, it looks as if we own one old trunk," Pete grumbled, seizing a leather handle at one end. "Now what'll we do with it?"

"Take it back to the salvage yard, and open it," Jupe said, ^{grasping} ~~seizing~~ the leather handle at the other end. "~~What, it's heavy, you~~ go first, Pete."

"Wait a minute, fellows," the second workman said. "First it has to be paid for. Mustn't forget that important detail." "Oh, that's right." Jupe put down his end, reached in his pocket for a leather wallet, took out a dollar bill, and handed it to the man. The man scribbled on something and gave it to him.

"Your receipt," he said. "Now it's yours. If there's ^{he} any royal jewels in it, you own them. Ha^h haw!" He ~~snuck~~ ^{he} laughed at the idea and let the boys take the trunk. With Pete in the lead, and Bob ahead of him pushing a way through the crowd, they carried the small ~~but heavy~~ trunk toward the rear of the room. They had just got it through the rows of people when the white-haired ~~man~~ ^{woman who} had come rushing in too late to bid hustled up to them.

"Boys," She said, "I'll buy that trunk from you for twenty-five dollars. I collect old trunks and I want this one for my collection."

"Gosh, twenty-five dollars!" Pete exclaimed. "Take it, Jupe!"

"It's a very good profit, and the trunk isn't really worth a cent more even to a collector," the ^{woman} man said. "Here you are, twenty-five dollars."

J J
~~He already had the money in his hand, thrusting it toward~~
She took the money from a large pocketbook and thrust Jupiter Jones. To the amazement of Bob and Pete, Jupiter shook his head.

man
"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "We don't want to sell it. We want to see what's in it."

woman
"There can't be anything in it of value," the man said, looking up set. "Here, I'll give you thirty dollars. ~~That's~~ absolutely as far as I can go."

Jupiter shook his head.

"No, thank you," ~~he~~ ^{she} said. "I really don't want to sell it."

woman
The man sighed heavily. Then, just as ^{she} he was about to say something more, ^{she} he seemed to take alarm. He turned and scurried away, losing himself in the crowd. ^{he}He had apparently been frightened by the approach of a young man carrying a camera.

man
"I'm Fred Brown. I'm a reporter for The Hollywood News, and I'm ^a looking for ~~kind of~~ human interest story. I'd like to take your picture with the trunk. It's the only thing at all unusual in the sale. Just lift it up, will you? That's fine. And you--" he spoke to Bob, ---"stand behind it so you'll be in the picture."

There didn't seem any harm in having their picture taken, so Pete and Jupe lifted the trunk and Bob stood behind it. Bob noticed that across the top of the trunk ^{were} ~~was~~ stencilled in faded white paint the words ~~GULLIVER THE GREAT~~ GULLIVER.

The young man aimed the camera, a flashbulb went off, and the picture was taken.

"Thanks," the reporter said. "Now may I have your names?[?] And will you tell me why you refused thirty dollars for it? Seems like a nice profit to me."

"We're just curious," Jupiter said. "I think it's an old theatrical trunk and we want to see what's in it. We just bought it for fun, not to make a profit."

"Then you don't believe it has the Russian crown jewels in it?" The young man chuckled.

"It might have old costumes in

"That's just talk," Pete said. ~~"But it's pretty heavy. It might it. have old books in it."~~ "Could be," the young man agreed. "That name, Gulliver the Great, sounds very theatrical. Speaking of names, ~~"Could be," the reporter agreed. "Now what did you say your what did you say yours were?"~~ names were?"

"We didn't say," Jupiter answered. "But here's our card. We're--uh--well, we investigate things."

He handed the reporter one of The Three Investigator's[?] business cards, of which all three carried a supply, at all times.

~~The young man looked at it interestedly.~~ It said:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

"We Investigate Anything"

? ? ?

First Investigator.....Jupiter Jones

Second Investigator.....Pete Crenshaw

Records and Rsearch....Bob Andrews

"So?" The reporter raised his eyebrows. "You're investigators, eh? What do the question marks stand for?"

"That's our symbol," Jupiter told him, ~~holding himself erect~~ and ~~seeming very adult~~. "The question mark stands for mysteries unsolved, ~~mysteries~~ riddles unanswered, puzzles of any kind.

So we use it ~~sort of~~ as our trademark. We investigate any kind of mystery."

"And now you're investigating an old theatrical trunk." Well, ~~well~~. The young man smiled and ~~carefully~~ put the card in his pocket. "Thanks a lot. Maybe you'll see your picture in tonight's paper. Depends on whether the editor likes the story or not. ~~Here's~~ my card. ~~I'm Fred Brown, of the Hollywood News.~~"

9 He gave Jupiter a card which Jupiter put in his pocket. Then he raised his hand in a gesture of goodbye, and turned away. Jupe picked up his end of the trunk again.

"Come on, Pete, we have to get this outside," he said. "We can't keep Hans waiting the small truck any longer."

With Bob leading the way, he and Pete lugged the trunk toward the street entrance. Pete was still grumbling.

"Why did you tell that fellow our names?" he said.

"Publicity," Jupiter said. "Every business needs publicity for people to know about it. Lately good mysteries ~~are~~ have been scarce and we can use some business or we'll get rusty."

~~"That figures,"~~ Pete agreed.

They went through the big door and out onto the sidewalk. Hans and the light truck were parked a few yards down the street. They carried the trunk to the truck and heaved it into the back. Then they ~~thankfully~~ climbed into the cab of the truck with Hans.

"Back home, Hans," Jupiter said. "We have made a purchase and we wish to examine it."

"Sure thing, Jupe," Hans agreed, getting the truck started. "You buy something, huh?"

"An old trunk," Pete said. "How're we going to open it, First?"

"We have many keys around the salvage hard," Jupiter told him. "If we're lucky one of them will work."

"Maybe we'll have to break it open," Bob suggested.

"No." Jupiter shook his head. "That would spoil it. We'll get the lock open somehow."

They rode the rest of the way in silence, ~~enjoying the warm Southern Californian sunshine.~~ When they reached The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach, Pete and Jupe handed down the trunk to Hans, who set it ^{to one side.} ~~in the shade.~~ Mrs. Jones, who was in the little cabin that served as an office, came out.

"Mercy and goodness, what have you bought?" she asked.

"Why, that trunk looks old enough to have come over on the Mayflower."

"Not quite, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said. "But it is old. We paid a dollar for it."

"Well, at least you didn't waste much money on it," said his aunt ~~approvingly~~. "I suppose you need the bunch of keys to ~~tree~~ to open it. They're on a nail over the desk."

Bob ran in to get the keys, while ~~Pete and Jupiter~~ examined the trunk more closely. They now found a tag tacked to the side. It said The Great Gulliver--Majestic Theatre. But it didn't say where the ^{"Majestic"} theatre was or give any date. It looked very old and faded however.

"The Great Gulliver!" Pete exclaimed. "You were right, Jupe, the fellow who owned this trunk was an actor."

"Hmmm," Jupe murmured. "Here's Bob. Let's try the keys, Bob."

~~Bob gave him the big bunch of old keys to suitcases,~~
trunks and other luggage, which had gathered in the salvage yard ~~over~~ over a period of years. Jupe began trying all that seemed the right size. After about half an hour he had tried all of the keys and none of them would open the trunk.

~~The boys stared at it in frustration.~~

"Now what'll we do?" Pete asked.

"Pry it open?" Bob suggested.

"Not yet," ~~Jupe~~ told them. "I believe Uncle Titus has more keys put away someplace. We'll wait until he comes ^{back} and ask him for them."

At this point Jupiter's aunt came out again.

"Well, boys," she said briskly, "can't ^a waste all day."

Time to get to work. First lunch, then work. You'll have to let the old trunk wait."

Reluctantly the boys gave up trying to open the trunk. They had lunch in Mrs. Jones' kitchen, then they set to work mending and ^{re}pairing broken articles in the salvage yard, articles Titus Jones would later sell, ^{giving} and give them part of the profit for spending money. This kept them well-occupied until late in the afternoon, when Titus Jones and Konrad, the other yard helper, came lumbering into the yard in the big truck, bearing a load of articles Mr. Jones had bought that day.

Titus Jones, a small man with a large nose and an enormous black moustache, hopped down as lightly as a boy and ²embraced his wife. Then he waved a newspaper he held in his hand.

"Gather round, boys!" he called. "You're in the newspaper!"

Curiously the three boys joined him and his wife, and Titus Jones spread out The Hollywood News to show them the first page of the second section. There, sure enough, was their picture---Bupe and Pete holding the old trunk, Bob standing behind it. ~~It was a clear picture--even the named Galtier the Great~~ ^{headline} ~~A headline said: YOUNG SLEUTHS TO INVESTIGATE MYSTERY~~ ~~was clear on the trunk. A headline said~~ ⁶ ~~TRUNK.~~ The story that went with it told, in a humorous manner, of their buying the trunk, of refusing to sell it for a profit, and hinted that they expected to find something very mysterious or valuable inside it. Of course, this last was just the reporter's imagination, because they had no idea what they'd find inside it, but it was obviously thrown in to make ² the story more entertaining.

The story also gave their names and said their headquarters was in The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach.

"Well, that's publicity, all right," Pete said. "It makes us sound kind of foolish, though, thinking there's something valuable in the trunk."

"That was because the auctioneer talked about the Russian crown jewels," Jupiter said. "We'll have to cut this out and add it to our scrapbook."

"Later," Mrs. Jones said firmly. "It's dinnertime now. Put the trunk away and wash up. Bob, Pete, are you going to eat with us tonight?"

Bob and Pete ate ^{at} Jupiter's home about as often as they did at their own, but this time they thought they'd better get on home. So they peddled off on their bicycles. Jupiter pushed the old trunk ~~under~~ around the corner of the office, where it should be safe enough. Mr. Jones locked the big iron front gates of the salvage yard--fancy, ornamental gates bought from an estate that burned down--and they all went in to eat.

The rest of the evening was uneventful, until just as Jupiter was going up to bed ⁹ there came a cautious knocking on the door. It was Hans and Konras, *who lived in a small house in the back.*

"Just wanted to tell you, Mr. Jones," Hans said softly. "We ~~saw~~ ^{saw} a light in the salvage yard, we take look through fence, somebody fooling around in there. Maybe we all better have look, huh?"

A "Mercy and goodness and [†]sweetness and light! Burglars!" Mrs. Jones gasped. "But ~~what would anybody want to steal second hand junk for?~~"

"We'll take a look, Mathilda my dear," Mr. Jones said ~~firmly~~. "With Hans and Knorad, we can handle any burglar. ~~Come along, boys,~~ We'll slip up on ~~at~~ the intruders and catch them by surprise."

He and the two husky yard helpers began to move cautiously toward the front gates of the salvage yard. Jupiter tagged along behind. No one had suggested he come, but on the other hand no one had said he couldn't.

Now, through the cracks in the board fence surrounding the yard, they could see flickers of light as someone used a flashlight inside. They tiptoed cautiously forward. Then--disaster! Hans tripped over something, ~~and~~ fell heavily to the ground. ^{and} ~~Without being able to help it, he~~ gave a loud "Oof!" of surprise.

Whoever was inside the yard heard him. Immediately there was the sound of running feet. [†]Two dark figures ran out through the front gate, leaped into a car parked across the street, and roared away.

Mr. Jones, Konrad and Jupiter ran swiftly to the salvage yard. The front gate stood open, the lock obviously picked. The thieves were gone. But Jupiter, with a sudden suspicion, ran to where he had left the old trunk he had bought.

The mystery trunk was gone!

