

The Story - A CRYPT OF GOLD

Chapter I - HEADLINE NEWS

Crypt of Gold in the Deep!

Oceanographers discover wreck of ancient vessel! Extreme depth prohibits exploration! Government keeps location top secret. Our sources indicate negotiations for salvage are underway. Digital image below from oceanographer's personal camera seems to depict golden facemask of ancient Incan origin. Government officials refuse comment.



--- end of news clip

Remo and Rachel Strong looked at each other over the breakfast table. Remo had just read the headline out loud, and the scrambled eggs were instantly forgotten. Rachel's eyebrows went up: "Well?" – "Let's go for it!" Remo shot back, pushing his chair back from the table.

"I'll call George" he said to Rachel's back, because Rachel was already on her way to their home office, her thoughts on logistics. Equipment needed to be checked, the crew notified, supplies loaded in, and then there was the never-ending stream of paperwork: contracts, permits, etc.

They had won some government salvage contracts before although never anything this BIG, and George was their liaison.

Rachel could hear Remo on the phone as she was clearing away the dishes and getting ready to make her own calls to the crew.

"Hi George, Good Morning to you."

"How am I doing? Great, George, how about you?"

“Good to hear that. Listen, we just read the headline about the wreck. Is it true that a salvage contract is open?”

“It is? Well, George, I’m surprised we haven’t been contacted. You know we’ve done some great work for you before?”

“Wow, that’s a bit unusual I’d say. But ok, I understand you guys want a broader net this time since it’s such an immense project. How do we apply?”

“Send a letter to the usual address stating why we want the contract and what makes us think we should get it. Hmm... Well, if that’s what it takes – say, do YOU think we have a fighting chance to win this one?”

“Ok, thanks for the vote of confidence. We’ll get on it right away. Send it to the usual address, right?”

“Right-o. You’ll have it on your desk by tonight. We’ll send it encrypted e-mail. Hey, have a great day!”

Remo drummed his fingers impatiently as the computer booted up. Public relations, as they called it, were his responsibility while Rachel looked after the logistics.

Rachel was apparently in full swing.

“No Jack, I can’t wait till you catch that big wave. I need you here NOW. Get on the next plane and report to the office by 0700 tomorrow!”

“Oh jeez – what did you do with all that money from the last job? Ok, I’ll book you a flight on the company credit card and we’ll take it off your cut. Hurry!”

Jack Blithe – what an exercise in frustration! The ‘jack of all trades’ for the ship was 23 years old but often seemed stuck in his early teens. He was, of course, the extra hand they needed. Theirs was a tight crew with everyone wearing more than one hat, and Jack, although he needed constant supervision, was in general an exceptionally good hand.

“Cood? Yes, how’s it going?”

“Good, I’m glad you’re bored. We got a big one. Can you make it here by 0700 tomorrow for a briefing?”

“Great. Hey, thanks for being so reliable. Jack is off playing games again. I don’t know when that kid will ever grow up. I’m pulling my hair out here.”

“Yes, I know, he’s a good kid and we need him.”

“Ok, I’ll leave him in your capable hands. Oh, by the way, do you know where Handle is hanging out now?”

“Ah, I thought so. He couldn’t sit idle when there’s a ship to steer, huh? I’ll call him now. Thanks for that cell phone number; I don’t think I have it on file. See you at 0700!”

Cood now, what would they do without him? He was the Chief Officer on Deck, Rich Joiner, but they all called him by his rank acronym. With his long-term experience in personnel management, he kept the crew in line and more often than not lent a helping hand when one was needed.

“Hi Handle, what’re you up to?”

“What? I can’t hear you; you’re breaking up”

“Working for a garbage company!?”

“Listen, you must be really deep. I can hardly hear a thing you’re saying. Can you call me from the surface?”

“Oh, you’re coming up now? Good, be at the office at 0700 tomorrow. We got a big one on the line!”

Sam Handle was the chief engineer. As such, he maneuvered the vessel through the often murky depths of the ocean during their most difficult salvage operations. He was also the master mechanic, keeping the equipment maintained and had often done field repairs that bordered on the miraculous.

Good naturedly, he endured the occasional jibes that labeled him “Jam Handle” whenever he made a minor mistake. So far, nothing major had gone wrong, and they all owed their safety to his talents and diligence.

“Good morning, Eyes, what’re you up to?”

“Going over the depth maps? Oh, so you’ve read the headline this morning. Good! But we don’t know where the find is yet. The government is keeping it top secret. We’re going for the contract though and should have a target soon! Briefing is at 0700 tomorrow; see you there!”

Eyes’ real name was Hyass McOppen. The Scotchman ran their sonar, camera equipment and doubled as navigator. It was, of course, Jack Blithe who’d irreverently named him “Eyes Open”.

Hyass had glared at him from under his bushy eyebrows, but the name had stuck.

“Hi, Cookie, what’s cooking?” Rachel was by now on a roll, and this task was beginning to be fun – could it be because she was listening to Remo hum to himself at his desk where, she was sure, he was writing the application letter in his usual charming, persuasive manner?

“Say, Cookie, did you read the news this morning?”

“Yes, Remo and I think it’s a great opportunity, too. Remo is writing out the application as we speak. Can you make it to the briefing at 0700 tomorrow?”

“Great! I knew I could count on you. See you then! – Oh, and you’re bringing Socrates, right?”

“Wonderful! See you two then!”

Nobody even remembered Cookie’s real name, for he had been in charge of their physical requirements for so long. He was, of course, the cook, but he also helped monitor their life support equipment, oxygen and pressure levels, supervised supplies and kept Jack busy peeling potatoes when not otherwise busy running errands.

Socrates was his beloved parrot. Cookie had found Socrates on a dingy back street in a dismal little town in South America. Socrates had no name at the time, he was starved, and his few remaining feathers were dull. He owned language that would make a drunken sailor blush, and he was generally disgruntled and hostile. Cookie had lovingly nursed him back to health, cleaned up his language and taught him phrases that kept the crew in

stitches. The pair was pretty much responsible for every one's morale and well-being.

Her calls to the crew finished, she brought her computer up to the task of preparing a list of items to discuss at the briefing.

To get the rest of the Crypt of Gold story go to <http://www.selfsabotagestop.com>