

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS in
The Case of the
Restless Gargoyle



A FAN-STORY BY MARK ZAHN

The Three Investigators

in

**THE CASE
OF THE
RESTLESS
GARGOYLE**

Text by Mark Zahn

Based on characters created by Robert Arthur

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I would like to thank my wife, Melissa, for her love and patience while I pursue this “hobby.” I would also like to thank Seth T. Smolinske for graciously providing his web-site as a forum for my stories.

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Mark Zahn

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*Dedicated to Dennis Lynds -
A true man of mystery.*

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A SHORT PREVIEW BY

JOHN CROW

Greetings mystery lovers!

It gives me great pleasure to introduce another spine-tingling tale starring those cunning young sleuths known as The Three Investigators. For those who don't remember who I am, let me just say that I am a mystery novelist by profession. The boys and I first met several months ago when they traveled to my hometown of Santa Barbara, California to uncover the secret of Shark Reef. As a favor to the boys' mentor, my colleague Hector Sebastian, I agreed to introduce their last case: *The Adventure of the Bronze Claw*.

Now a mystery has brought the boys once more to Santa Barbara ---- and since I play a part in the story, my good friend Hector suggested that I handle the introductions. I have gladly put the manuscript to my latest mystery novel aside and poured over the notes of the case.

And what a case! Seldom have the boys been more baffled, and seldom have their deductive skills been put to such a test. Speaking of the boys, I suppose I should introduce them for those who have yet to make their acquaintance. Jupiter Jones, the stout First Investigator and brainy leader of the junior detective firm, is stubbornly persistent in pursuit of a mystery - no matter where it may lead or what grotesque secret it may uncover. Pete Crenshaw, the athletic Second Investigator, is more cautious in the face of danger than Jupe, but always in the thick of the

action when his skills are needed. Bob Andrews, small in stature and studious in appearance, is in charge of Records and Research, a duty for which he shows a natural flair.

All three of the boys live not far from Hollywood in Rocky Beach, California, where they have established a headquarters within the piles of junk inside the Jones Salvage Yard. Headquarters itself is a damaged thirty-foot mobile home trailer that Jupiter's Uncle Titus was unable to sell ---- so he gave it to Jupe to use as a clubhouse for his friends. It's hidden from view by strategically placed salvage, and now long forgotten by all but the boys. Inside it is equipped with many tools of the detective trade - hand-built by Jupe - as well as a telephone, laboratory, darkroom, and an office.

Well, enough with the pleasantries! If you think you have the mettle to come face to face with a restless gargoyle, I recommend you turn to chapter one and commence with the story.

JOHN CROWE

1

CALL TO ACTION

JUPITER JONES LIKED to keep himself busy when The Three Investigators were without a case, but that didn't mean he necessarily liked to work.

It was a week until summer vacation, and Jupe knew from experience that his Aunt Mathilda would be gearing up for the big summer season at the Jones Salvage Yard. That meant painting, scrubbing, sanding, sweeping, and worst of all ---- taking inventory.

It was a tedious task, but Jupe never complained about having to do inventory each summer because it allowed him to skip over the large mound of salvage near his outdoor workshop. That large mound hid a thirty-foot mobile home trailer: the boys' secret headquarters.

Jupiter had lived with his Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus ever since he was orphaned as a small child. Living next to the salvage yard was like having the world's largest playground at his disposal ---- for it was no ordinary junkyard! Uncle Titus prided himself in the fact that people came from all over California, and often from all over the country, just to peruse its unusual inventory. If there was a curious item that a customer couldn't find - it was a good bet they could locate it at the Jones Salvage Yard!

Jupiter had known the upcoming summer season would mean he'd have to put in extra time at the yard, so this year he'd made a head start. Just the week before, he had tackled one of the biggest chores on Aunt Mathilda's agenda: touching up the high wooden fence that surrounded the yard.

Years ago, Titus Jones had used a whole rainbow of colors to paint the fence. And since he often helped out local artists in the area by letting them have some small piece of junk or a can of paint for free, they came out in droves to help him paint his fence. Now the exterior of the salvage yard looked like one big, moving painting! The tall fence was festooned with lakes and swans, flowers and trees, and an ocean scene in which mighty ships battled green, crashing waves.

To keep the fence looking bright and fresh, Aunt Mathilda sent Jupiter out at the start of each summer to touch up spots where the paint had peeled or faded. Since the perimeter of the fence was so large, this process often took up several days. But now that it had been done to his Aunt's satisfaction, Jupiter was free to make some improvements of his own.

At the moment he was in a corner of the junkyard in which he had arranged his outdoor workshop. When not solving mysteries or being put to work, this was where Jupiter passed the time working on his inventions. His gadgets had started out as a hobby, but as The Three Investigators became more successful, his inventions quickly became a necessity.

Over the last year or so he had built walkie-talkies for

the firm, as well as a loudspeaker and answering machine for the office phone, a periscope that allowed the boys to see out of the buried headquarters, a trailing device, and homing beacons. Several components to his latest invention, a device that emitted a large cloud of harmless smoke into the air, were scattered across his workbench.

Jupiter grabbed a screwdriver and oil can and approached two boards in the fence. On the outside of the fence was a picture of a green ocean with a two-masted ship riding the waves of a mighty storm. A fish had been painted in the foreground of the picture, watching the foundering vessel. An artist had made a knot in the wood the fish's eye. When the eye was pressed, it activated a catch that swung the two boards up. This was Green Gate One, one of several secret entrances in and out of the salvage yard.

Jupe was about to tighten the screws and oil the spring on the device when the gate suddenly opened and Pete Crenshaw pushed his bike through.

"Hey Jupe!" he grinned. "I saw your Aunt Mathilda keeping Hans and Konrad busy stacking lumber, so I thought I'd better steer clear of the front gates."

Hans and Konrad were two blond brothers from Bavaria that worked at the yard full-time as handymen. They lived in a small cottage behind the main house, and to the Jones's they were just like family.

"A wise move, Pete," Jupiter chuckled. "I've got a lot I want to get done today, so the longer we can avoid Aunt Mathilda the better. Have you seen Bob?"

Pete leaned his bicycle against a large printing press that Jupiter had rebuilt. "He called me this morning

sounding pretty excited. He mentioned something about going on a trip.”

Jupiter finished up the repairs on Green Gate One and pulled a scrap of paper out of his pocket. The stocky boy crossed something out with a pencil and studied the list.

“What’s that, Jupe?”

Jupiter stuck the pencil behind his ear and handed the list to Pete. “A list of things I was hoping to get done before summer vacation starts and Aunt Mathilda puts us to work. If Bob is leaving on vacation we’ll have to double our efforts!”

Just then the boards of Green Gate One opened once more and Bob Andrews wheeled his bicycle through. Bob was the smallest of the three and was in charge of all Records and Research for The Three Investigators. “Hey fellows,” he said excitedly, “boy do I have swell news!”

“If you’re going on vacation, take me with you!” Pete snorted. “Between Jupe and Aunt Mathilda I might not have a moment’s rest!”

“What’s the big news, Bob?” asked Jupiter.

Bob parked his bicycle next to Pete’s and sat down on Jupiter’s workbench. “My dad is covering the big actors’ strike in Hollywood ---- he asked me if I wanted to come with him!” Bob’s father worked as a reporter for a big newspaper in Los Angeles and often covered the biggest news events. Since Bob showed a keen interest in news and investigation, his father sometimes let him tag along on smaller stories. The actors’ strike was a high profile story and Bob had been thrilled when his father had asked him to help out.

“Gee, that’s neat!” exclaimed Pete.

“I read about the actors’ strike in the newspaper,” said Jupe thoughtfully. The First Investigator had once been a child actor on a television program, and while he’d rather forget his brief brush with fame, he still held a deep appreciation for the theater. “The actors are demanding a higher share of the revenues from their pictures. They’re getting a lot of support from many famous thespians. I heard that even Madeline Bainbridge is going to make an appearance!”

Madeline Bainbridge was a reclusive actress that the boys had helped when they investigated *The Mystery of the Magic Circle* a short time before. “Wow!” Pete said in surprise. “It must be really important for Ms. Bainbridge to leave her house!”

“Indeed,” Jupiter agreed, “the actors’ union is taking this very seriously. They are threatening to quit working in one week if the studios don’t meet their demands.”

“When do you leave, Records?” asked Pete.

“Just as soon as I’m done with final exams. Dad’s leaving today and is coming back to pick me up on Friday!”

Jupiter pulled his list out once more and handed it to Bob. “In that case, we better get hustling if we want to get all this done before you go! Since The Three Investigators are currently without a client, I propose we utilize this time to make some necessary repairs to our headquarters. Tunnel Two needs new scraps of carpet ---- the old carpet is getting worn down. I’ve already given Green Gate One a tune-up, but Blue Gate Two and Red Gate Rover need to be checked. We also need to test all the entrances to headquarters ---- I

noticed that Door Four won't stay shut and the locks to Emergency One and Easy Three are pretty rusty."

Pete groaned at his chubby friend. "You're sounding more and more like your Aunt Mathilda every day!"

They all laughed and were about to set off on their individual chores when a flashing red light suddenly began blinking over the printing press.

Jupiter's eyes lit up. He pulled aside a section of old iron grating that appeared to merely lean against the bottom of a workbench. "A phone call! Maybe it's Mr. Sebastian with a case!" Behind the grating lay a long, large section of galvanized pipe ---- the kind used for culverts. This was Tunnel Two. It was about forty feet long, and at one point the pipe went underground, beneath some large iron beams, then ended at a wooden door opening up through the floor of headquarters.

Inside headquarters was a small office equipped with a desk that had been damaged in a fire, a few chairs, a typewriter, several filing cabinets, and a telephone. The rest of the trailer had been outfitted with a small darkroom, a tiny laboratory, and a washroom. Jupe scrambled through and snatched up the phone. He snapped on the old-fashioned table radio he had converted into a loudspeaker so they all could hear the conversation.

"The Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Hello, young Jones!" said a familiar voice. "This is John Crowe calling. Are The Three Investigators engaged with a client at the moment?"

"No, sir!" said Jupiter eagerly, "In fact we thought you might be Mr. Sebastian calling with a case for us."

John Crowe chuckled. "Well then, today's your lucky day! It just so happens that I have a rather strange phenomenon that needs examined ---- if you're interested!"

"What exactly is the strange phenomenon, sir?" Jupiter asked seriously.

The mystery writer cleared his throat and paused for a moment, as if trying to find the right words. "Well, an elderly friend of mine here in Santa Barbara, a Mr. Eldridge, says he has seen a gargoyle atop the building next to his house that won't, er, that is to say ---- well, confound it ---- it won't stay put!"

Jupiter blinked at Pete and Bob, who both returned his look of astonishment. "A gargoyle that won't stay put, sir?" he repeated.

"Perhaps I'd better let Mr. Eldridge tell you himself," Mr. Crowe sighed. "I don't know all the details myself; only that he was very upset when he called me, and he is reluctant to call the police. I told him I knew an investigation firm that specialized in cases such as this. Do you think you could pay him a visit?"

Jupiter looked doubtful. "Well, we've still got a week of school left before we get out for summer vacation, and Bob will be leaving with his father right after that. But this case sounds too promising to pass up! We will pay Mr. Eldridge a visit this afternoon."

"Splendid!" John Crowe exclaimed. He gave the boys Mr. Eldridge's home address. "Your visit will do a lot to set his mind at ease. I hope as the case progresses you'll stop by my house and keep me up to date on the details."

"We certainly will!" Jupiter said. He thanked the

author and hung up the phone.

“A gargoyle that won’t sit still?” Pete shivered. “Gee, Bob, do you suppose your dad needs some extra help in Hollywood?”

Jupiter and Bob grinned. They both knew Pete had an aversion to ghosts, goblins, monsters, and spooks ---- but they also knew that he was a lot braver than he let on when it came time to investigate them.

Jupiter sighed. “Well, with final exams at school, Aunt Mathilda putting us to work here, and now this case, I guess my list will just have to wait.” He crumpled up the scrap of paper and tossed it into the trash. “Come on, fellows. Let’s pay a visit to Mr. Eldridge in Santa Barbara --- and see if we can spot a restless gargoyle!”

2

No SOLICITORS!

SOME TIME AGO, Jupiter Jones had won the use of a magnificent, gold-plated, antique Rolls Royce in a contest. The gleaming auto came equipped with many luxuries, but what the boys liked best about the car was its driver: Worthington. Worthington was a perfect English chauffeur who had driven the boys on many adventures, and had since become a fast friend ---- he even liked to think of himself as an unofficial 'fourth investigator.' According to the rules of the contest, the use of the car had expired after thirty days. But thanks to the generosity of a grateful client, the boys had been awarded a lengthy extension on their contract.

Because Santa Barbara was located eighty miles north of Rocky Beach, Jupiter immediately phoned the Rent-'n'-Ride Auto Rental Agency to request the services of Worthington and the vehicle. A gruff voice picked up the phone on the other end.

"Gelbert speaking."

"Hello, Mr. Gelbert, this is Jupiter Jones calling. I would like to request the use of Worthington and the Rolls Royce for this morning, please."

It was no secret that Mr. Gelbert didn't care for the boys, and Jupe in particular. He seemed greatly pleased



whenever he had to inform them that the car was unavailable. To him it seemed a waste to have kids driven about in such a fine automobile.

“Worthington’s already on duty,” Gelbert said icily. “He took the Rolls over to Hollywood to pick up some dame and drive her to the actors’ strike. This lady wants to look good driving to the picket line, and she’s paid in advance.”

Surprised, Jupiter’s voice faltered. “Oh ---- I see . . .”

Gelbert snickered, then continued on in a nasty voice. “Gee, I’m really sorry kid, but Worthington will probably be tied up with the car until the strike is settled. Perhaps you’d like something else? Maybe I can have Fitch drive you and your pals on a scooter.”

“That won’t be necessary, Mr. Gelbert” Jupiter said in his most dignified manner. “Thank you for your time, sir.” He hung up the phone and looked at Bob and Pete dejectedly. “Worthington’s in Hollywood at the actors’ strike. I guess we’ll have to ask Aunt Mathilda if Hans or Konrad can drive us in one of the trucks.”

Bob looked skeptical. “Golly, Jupe, I don’t know. With the end of school coming up, we haven’t really done too much work around the yard. Aunt Mathilda might put her foot down this time.”

“It’s a chance we’ll have to take,” the First Investigator decided. “We may have to promise to put in extra time at the yard in the coming weeks.”

And that was just what they had to do. As predicted, Aunt Mathilda wasn’t thrilled to give up four strong workers on a Saturday, but she finally relented when Jupe promised to finish the inventory just as soon as school was let out.

Grumbling, she fed them all ---- the boys usually ate wherever they happened to be whenever it was mealtime ---- and she packed a sandwich and thermos of coffee for Konrad.

When they were done eating, Konrad pulled the yard's smaller truck up to the big iron gates and the boys climbed inside. Jupe gave directions and soon they were headed north on the freeway.

As they drove, Pete asked something that had been bothering him ever since they had received John Crowe's mysterious call. "Jupe, just what *is* a gargoyle anyway? I mean, what exactly are they for? I know they're big ugly things made out of stone ---- but why would anyone want one on his building?"

Being slightly chubby since birth, Jupiter had an aversion to being laughed at. Being the overweight star of a kid's sitcom with the unfortunate stage-name of 'Baby Fatso' didn't help matters either. To make up for it, he had devoured every book he could get his hands on since he was able to read. He was well known for his amazing memory, and often surprised adults with his uncommon knowledge of art, literature, science, and mathematics.

"Gargoyles," he began stuffily, "were first used as decorative waterspouts made out of stone. They were often carved as grotesque human or animal shapes and projected from the roof or eaves of castles, cathedrals, and fortresses. No one knows exactly when they came into existence, but it is thought that they probably made their first appearance in the middle ages. Scholars have theorized that they were used as symbolic guardians, as well as to scare away enemies who tried to scale the walls."

Jupiter looked thoughtful for a moment, then continued. "They're not seen too often in architecture anymore, and I've certainly never heard of one that can't sit still."

"I'd like to keep it that way," Pete muttered.

"I tend to agree with Pete," added Bob.

"Gargoyles are wicked creatures," Konrad chimed in. "Back home in the Black Forest of Bavaria, there are many of these things. As children, Hans and I were told stories of demons that were turned to stone. On certain nights people see them fly away, and kids say their prayers or they are snatched away by the gargoyles." He looked at Jupiter seriously. "It is not good to mess with such things, Jupe. You should be careful."

Pete gulped. "F-fly away?"

Jupiter crossed his arms stubbornly. "Gargoyles are stone figures ---- they don't fly. Those stories are just folklore and superstition. In America we have the bogeyman; it's just a tale adults tell to get kids to behave. Remember, Hans was just as superstitious when we investigated gnomes." Jupiter was referring to the time The Three Investigators had helped a Miss Agawam, who claimed gnomes were invading her yard, in *The Mystery of the Vanishing Treasure*.

Pete wasn't entirely convinced, but Jupiter refused to discuss it further ---- his rational mind was unwilling to accept such things as flying gargoyles.

In less than an hour they had arrived in Santa Barbara. Following the directions given to him by John Crowe, Jupiter guided Konrad along the streets of the oceanside town until

they passed into a picturesque, tree-lined residential district.

Jupiter located the address and Konrad pulled the truck in front of a very large, and very old, Victorian house.

Konrad called after the boys as they climbed out. “I wait here. Remember to be careful, Jupe, hokay?”

“Thank you Konrad, we won’t be long.”

Konrad looked as if he were uncomfortable being anywhere near a gargoyle. He scanned the rooftops nervously, then pulled a newspaper out and opened it wide to read.

Standing on the sidewalk in front of the house, the three friends craned their necks looking up at the spiraling peaks of the historic structure. It was a fantastic three-story house, looking more like a castle with its tiered roof, than a house for an elderly man. The yard was well-kept, and quaint rose bushes were arranged on either side of the massive front porch.

The boys climbed the steps and rang the bell. A somber chime rang out deep within the house. Moments later the boys could hear the sound of footsteps approaching on a hardwood floor. A curtain covering the window was pulled aside, then the door was whisked open and a scowling woman dressed in black stood glaring at the boys.

She was about forty years old, had short-cropped hair that had obviously been dyed black, and her thin lips were outlined with sharp red lipstick. Her eyes were hidden behind dark sunglasses.

“We don’t want whatever it is you’re selling. Can’t you read the sign?” She pointed a cruel finger at a small note on the mailbox. It read: NO SOLICITORS!

“That means you,” she snapped, “now scram!”

The woman in black slammed the door shut, and the shocked Investigators could do nothing but listen to her heels click away on the wood floor of the hallway.

3

REAR WINDOW

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS stood on the front steps of Mr. Eldridge's house with shocked expressions.

"That definitely wasn't Mr. Eldridge," Bob said slowly. "Maybe we have the wrong house."

Jupiter stepped back onto the porch steps and examined the home's address. "This is the right place," he shrugged. "I guess we should ring again."

"You ring, Jupe," Pete said nervously, "I'll be in the truck with Konrad."

Before Pete could take a step, the front door was opened once more ---- this time by a tall, sturdy man with steel-gray hair, and large, black-framed glasses.

"You must be The Three Investigators," he smiled apologetically. "I'm Price Eldridge." He shook each of their hands in turn with a strong, iron grip, then nodded over his shoulder.

"Pay no mind to Trisha," he said, rolling his eyes, "she thinks she runs the place and is suspicious of everyone."

"I'm Jupiter Jones," Jupe said in his most professional manner, "and these are my partners, Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw. Our card." Jupiter presented Mr. Eldridge with one of the boys' over-sized business cards that they had

printed up on the rebuilt printing press back at the salvage yard. It read:

THE THREE INVESTIGATORS

“We Investigate Anything”

? ? ?

First Investigator.....Jupiter Jones

Second Investigator.....Peter Crenshaw

Records and Research.....Bob Andrews

“My, my,” Mr. Eldridge said, “very impressive. My friend John Crowe has spoken very highly of your ability to solve ---- er, *cases*, such as mine. But may I ask what the question marks are for?”

The three had been waiting for that question. Most everyone asked it when they first saw the card.

“The question mark, also known as the interrogation mark,” Jupiter said regally, “stands for questions unanswered, mysteries unknown, secrets that are hidden, and riddles needing solved. Our job is to uncover those secrets and solve the riddles. Therefore, the question mark is the official symbol of The Three Investigators.”

Price Eldridge smiled broadly. “I’m quite impressed with your seriousness. I’ll admit when Crowe told me you were just boys, I was skeptical. But now I see why he speaks so highly of you. But where are my manners - won’t you please come in?”

The boys thanked him and stepped within the dimly lit entryway of the huge house. Inside, the place smelled of furniture polish and floor wax. The high, beamed ceilings

held no cobwebs, and the large chandelier was free of dust. It was obvious that retirement hadn't slowed Price Eldridge down a bit!

"Follow me," he said.

They passed through a set of French doors and into a gloomy, quiet sitting room. Mr. Eldridge threw open all the curtains ---- the sunlight made the space seem much more inviting. The room was situated in the corner of the house, so two walls were almost all windows. A large brick fireplace with an enormous stone mantle took up much of another wall, and towering bookcases lined with row after row of books made up the rest of the room. One item that seemed out of place in the somber room was a large, sparkling television sitting in the far corner.

"Please, have a seat," Mr. Eldridge said. "I do so love to use this room when I have company. Houses aren't built with parlors much anymore, you know. I think they're a lost art. It's my favorite room in the house."

Mr. Eldridge noticed the boys staring at the oddly placed television. He smiled weakly. "A gift from my son. He meant well, and I appreciate the gesture, but I told him I really have no need for a new television. I don't watch that much as it is, and when I do I'm upstairs in my bedroom. I didn't have the heart to tell him to take it back. So there it sits. It's not even plugged in."

Pete and Bob seated themselves on a small love-seat by the window, and Jupiter helped himself to a large leather chair by the fireplace. The boys couldn't help but notice the unusual decorations in the room. On the free spaces of the walls hung several model airplanes. There were more planes

situated among the shelves of the bookcase, and a large oil painting of a military fighter plane hung over the mantle.

“Were you a pilot before you retired, sir?” Jupiter inquired.

“Indeed,” Mr. Eldridge beamed, pointing to the large oil-painting. “I flew that very plane you see in the painting during the war. After I got out of the Air Force, I was a pilot for Global Airlines for twenty-two years.”

Pete looked confused. “Gosh, Mr. Eldridge, you don’t look old enough to be retired. I mean, my Grandpa Peck was seventy before he retired!”

Price Eldridge laughed heartily and sat in a chair across from Jupiter. “At my age that’s a tremendous compliment, young man. No ---- if I had my way I’d still be flying.” He tapped the large black-framed glasses on his face. “Unfortunately, because of my eyesight, I was forced to take an early retirement. I live comfortably off my pension, but I do miss the thrill of being behind the controls of an airplane.”

“Gee, that’s too bad,” said Bob.

Price Eldridge shrugged his shoulders. “It could be worse, I guess. The rest of me is still in good health, and I manage to keep busy around here maintaining this house and tinkering with my models.”

“But enough about me. You boys have come a long way - perhaps we should discuss the, er . . . problem.”

“Yes sir,” Jupiter said importantly. “Mr. Crowe has already given us a brief outline of the case. Perhaps you could show us just where you were at the time of the occurrence.”

“Of course.” Mr. Eldridge stood and directed the boys out of the parlor and back through the front hallway. A wide staircase ran along the far wall, leading up to the second floor. They trooped up the steps to the landing, turned left, and ascended several more stairs. The retired pilot stopped at a door on the left side of the hallway. He produced a ring of keys and unlocked the door ---- throwing it open so they could see inside.

“My room is the master bedroom here. There are two other rooms on this floor which I rent out - one to the objectionable Miss Trisha Colgate, whom you’ve already met, and the other to a quiet gentleman named Harry Watson. There’s another room on the third floor, which is rented by my son, Archie.” Eldridge led them to a door at the end of the hallway and unlocked it. “That’s where I was when I - when I saw *it*.”

They climbed a narrow stairway and emerged into an attic that had been converted into modern living quarters. The room was a disaster. Clothes were strewn about the floor and piled high on the bed. Drawers were half opened and boxes of books and other assorted odds and ends were stacked carelessly about the room. Mr. Eldridge sighed and picked up an empty pizza box from the floor.

“My son is too old to be nagged about cleaning up his room, so I don’t come up here very often. But after awhile I get fed up and have to come in and clean. That’s what I was doing up here last week when I saw *it*.” Mr. Eldridge began moving about the room automatically, picking up empty soda cans and food wrappers. He moved to a window and looked out. The boys followed him and

peered through the grimy glass.

The view from the attic overlooked a sprawling backyard. Small cherry trees lined the inside of a tall, fenced-in half acre, and more rose bushes could be seen blooming in shades of red, white, and pink.

From their position three stories up, the boys could see much of the neighborhood. One structure that was hard to miss was a large, wild looking building directly across the alley from Eldridge's home. The building was built to look like an ancient Russian temple, with colorful steeples and spires rising majestically into the sky. Two menacing gargoyles rested on either side of the flat, center portion of the building's roof, between the two large spires on the corners. Even from a distance of fifty yards, the boys could see the creatures deep within the shadows of the towering turrets, smiling nastily as if keepers of an ancient secret.

"Wow!" said Bob. "Get a load of that building! What is that place, Mr. Eldridge?"

"Ah, the Mission Temple," Mr. Eldridge chuckled. "It never fails to draw a gasp from first-time viewers. The Temple was built over one hundred years ago by a local businessman who emigrated from Russia. He wanted something that reminded him of his homeland, I guess. There's a large auditorium inside, and it's been used for all kinds of things in the past. Big musical productions were put on there, town meetings - you name it. It was a movie theater for awhile back in the fifties, and they've even held a circus or two in there! It's a community theater now. They put on plays and serve dinner on the weekends. That's where my son works. He's an actor for the moment ---- although I

don't know how long that will last."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Jupiter.

Price Eldridge sighed and sat down on his son's bed. "I'm afraid Archie is rather like his mother. A dreamer, I suppose. The only thing he's certain of is that he doesn't want to work. He moves about from job to job. One year he's a writer. Next he's running for mayor. The longest job he's ever had was as an acrobat for a traveling carnival! Now he's determined to be an actor. He's good at heart, but rather irresponsible. I've tried to get him to take life more seriously, but I guess he's old enough to make his own decisions."

Pete was only half-listening. He couldn't take his eyes off the gargoyles. He wanted his brain to be ready to tell his feet to move in case one of the stone creatures got bored and decided to take a stroll.

As the tall boy stared at the chiseled monsters, something down below caught his eye. A person dressed in a large-brimmed black hat and swirling black cape had come along the side of the house and darted through the rose garden toward a gate in the back fence. Glancing back at the house, the mysterious figure placed a hand on a long scabbard that hung from his belt ---- and looked right at Pete!

4

THE MISSION TEMPLE

PETE LET OUT A CHOKED CRY and darted for the door. Bob and Jupiter looked out the window and saw the figure dressed in black slip through the back gate of the the tall fence.

“There’s someone in your garden!” Bob cried.

The boys hurried down the stairs after the man, leaving Mr. Eldridge sitting bewildered on his son’s bed.

Pete scrambled down the stairs and burst through the front door. He was moving so fast that he failed to see the man on the porch until it was too late. He cried out in surprise and swerved to miss him, but his momentum carried him forward and they both went tumbling to the floor of the porch in a confusing mass of arms and legs. The oversized bag the man had slung over his shoulder fell to the floor and several shoe-box sized parcels scattered across the porch.

The man was middle-aged and balding, and wore a light brown uniform of a delivery worker. Pete sprang to his feet and began to help him up.

“Gosh, I’m sorry, mister!”

The man looked at Pete with a dazed expression. The tall boy retrieved a bundle of boxes the man had been carrying, still apologizing profusely. He was relieved to see

the delivery man was now smiling.

“No harm done,” the man said in a quiet, unassuming voice. Pete handed him a box just as Bob and Jupiter came barreling out the front door.

“Yikes!” Bob cried.

The postal carrier yelped, and Pete tried to pull him aside, but it was again too late. For the second time, he went crashing down amid a sea of packages.

Pete tried to keep himself from laughing, but the whole scene was so comical that he couldn’t help himself. The athletic investigator began howling with laughter, and soon everyone on the porch was joining in.

Jupiter and Bob helped the still-chuckling delivery man up and apologized. Juve bent down to retrieve the shoebox sized packages that had fallen out of the delivery man’s bag. The First Investigator made a strange face when he picked them up, and ran his hand across the top of one of the boxes. The balding delivery man quickly took them from Jupiter’s hands, thanking him. His two front teeth showed a wide gap as he smiled gratefully.

Just then, Mr. Eldridge hurried out the front door and the delivery man cringed. This caused everyone to burst out laughing again. Price Eldridge could only stand there looking more puzzled than ever.

“I see you’ve met Mr. Watson,” Eldridge said finally.

Harry Watson wiped tears from his eyes and smiled. “H-how do you do,” he said timidly. “Don’t worry ---- I’m really quite fine,” he assured the boys. The delivery man handed a small package to Mr. Eldridge. “I was just finishing my route when these boys and I had a little run-in.

Are they friends of yours?"

Mr. Eldridge introduced The Three Investigators. "They're junior detectives," he explained to the delivery worker. "They're looking into some suspicious activity I've observed over at the Mission."

Harry Watson nodded absently as Mr. Eldridge went on talking. "Mr. Watson is the newest resident here. He moved in about two months ago and has been a model tenant. I hardly hear him come and go."

Watson looked at his feet with a somewhat bashful expression. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll be moving along," he said quietly. He tipped his hat to the boys. "Good day, gentlemen."

The boys watched the carrier enter the front door of the house, then turned to Mr. Eldridge.

"He seems nice enough," said Pete. "I wouldn't blame him if he were sore at us!"

Price Eldridge watched the delivery man make his way up the steps. "Believe it or not, that's the most I've heard Mr. Watson say since he's been here! He's out the door in the morning before anyone else is awake, and comes home so quietly that I seldom know he *is* home. I keep an open kitchen for all my borders to use whenever they'd like, but I've never seen him come out of his room!"

"It was strange," Jupiter mused. "When I picked up Mr. Watson's packages I noticed that they were all addressed to himself. And they were light as a feather ---- as if they were simply boxes wrapped in shipping paper but empty inside. And there was something else about them . . ."

Pete rolled his eyes. "Leave it to Jupe to find a

mystery in someone's mail," he said sarcastically.

"I suppose you're right," Jupiter shrugged. "Well, Mr. Eldridge ---- you've told us about your son, and now we've met Mr. Watson. Perhaps you could tell us about your other tenant: Miss Colgate."

The retired pilot sighed and leaned against the porch railing. "I only wish Miss Colgate were as quiet as Mr. Watson. You see, I'm still making payments on this house, and it didn't look like this when I bought it five years ago. I've slowly refurbished it, using the rent money from my tenants to pay for the supplies. Six months ago, two of my tenants who had been here for years both moved away. I had come to rely on their rent money, and suddenly I was struggling to get by on my pension."

Mr. Eldridge looked frustrated. "My son is in and out depending on what job he has at the moment, and doesn't meet his rent payment with any consistency. The bottom line is: I needed money! I took Miss Colgate in, even though I knew of her questionable past."

Jupiter's round face showed interest at this piece of information. "Was she in some kind of trouble?" he asked.

"I can't go into specific details about my tenants, they have a right to privacy; but Miss Colgate's past is fairly well known around Santa Barbara. She's an attorney, and has had a couple of run-ins with the law for, shall we say, unscrupulous behavior. She's rude and insensitive and thinks she runs the house. I'd evict her if I didn't count on her rent money so much."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip, a habit he had whenever he was deep in thought. "We seem to have forgotten about

the mysterious caped figure that was seen in the garden. Do you know who that might have been, Mr. Eldridge.”

The gray-haired man nodded his head. “That was probably Archie. He comes over from the Mission Temple to grab a bite to eat sometimes during rehearsals. In fact, he’s wearing one costume or another every time I see him.”

“He had some kind of tube attached to his belt, and was looking around like he was being watched,” said Pete.

“The tube was most likely a sword,” said Mr. Eldridge, “probably a prop of some kind. You’re welcome to go over and talk with him. The door to the Temple is kept unlocked most of the time. Just walk right in. They don’t mind visitors watching rehearsals as long as you’re quiet.”

The boys agreed to this and marched around the side of the house and through the gated fence in the backyard. They crossed the alley and walked around to the front entrance of the Mission Temple.

When they reached the front steps of the immense brick four-story, they were surprised to see a large yellow steam-shovel with the words: *Dunbar Construction* parked on the far side, and a gaping hole in one of the brick walls. A giant piece of plastic had been put up to cover the damage done by the wrecking machine.

“I wonder what’s going on?” said Bob. “It looks like they’re trying to tear the building down.”

Jupiter looked at the mess of bricks thoughtfully, then began marching up the steps. “There’s only one way to find out. Come on, fellows.”

The boys entered through an imposing set of iron-runged double doors and entered into a dimly-lit lobby. The

inside of the unusual building was just as impressive as the outside. Large marble support pillars descended from high vaulted ceilings all the way to the intricately tiled floor. Curving stairwells with iron railings and oak bannisters led up to the second floor. A rope hung in front of the steps with a sign that read: *No Access*.

Somewhere in the distance the boys could hear the echoing sounds of actors rehearsing their lines. Jupiter motioned for them to proceed, and the boys passed through a curtained entrance into a huge auditorium.

At the far end of the room, a group of actors were being coached through a scene by their director. The boys seated themselves in a row of plush seats and waited for the next break in the action. A half an hour later, the director announced a break and the boys headed down the sloping aisle toward the stage.

They scanned the actors, looking for one dressed in a black cape and hat. Finally they spied a handsome young man of about thirty walking their way. He was dressed in a wide-brimmed black hat and heavy opera cape.

Jupiter approached the man and let his face droop. It was a trick he used whenever he wanted adults to think he was just some dopey kid. "Archie Eldridge?"

"That's me," the man said. "Can I help you boys?"

Jupe smiled lamely and motioned to Bob and Pete. "My friends and I were wondering if you have any need for some kids in your play? We know your dad, and he said to come over here and ask you."

The young Eldridge took off his hat and ran a gloved hand through his hair. "I'm afraid not boys. We've got all

the parts filled. Besides, you're a little late. The play opens in a week! Maybe you can audition for the next one. Say, how do you know my father?"

Jupiter was very good at thinking on his feet. He was almost always prepared with a good cover story. "We, uh, we're helping him out around the yard. Taking care of his roses and cutting the grass."

Archie Eldridge placed a hand on the long black scabbard that hung from his belt ---- a large imitation ruby gleamed on the black metal. The actor smiled at the boys. "Well, then, I guess I'll be seeing you around the house. Listen, I've got to change costumes. I'm filling in for a sick cast member today. It was nice to meet you."

"Well, I guess that's that," said Pete. "Archie was the mysterious guy in the cape after all."

"Now what, Jupe?" asked Bob.

Jupiter thought for a moment and then began walking up the aisle. "I'd like to find a way to get out on the roof so we can examine those gargoyles."

"I was afraid you'd say that!" Pete moaned.

The boys went through the curtain at the end of the auditorium and back into the lobby. Jupe stepped over the rope with the *No Access* sign and trotted up the stairs to the second floor.

The landing at the top of the stairs was very dark, and they had to feel around for a light switch. Bob found one and clicked on a single bulb. With the light they could see that there were three large doors ---- one to the right, one to the left, and one in the middle. They tried each one in turn, only to find every one of them firmly locked.

Jupiter looked disappointed, but not defeated. Over the years he had taken apart many locks at the salvage yard in order to make minor repairs, and in doing so had become quite adept at opening most locks without a key. While he was opposed to breaking and entering, he felt the knowledge might be useful if the boys were ever locked in a room while on a case.

As Bob and Pete looked on, Jupe knelt before the doorknob on the right and put his eye up to the keyhole. He was taken completely by surprise at what was staring back at him from the other side. A human eye!

The stocky boy cried out in alarm and jerked away from the door. Just then, a voice shouted up from the stairwell, making them all gasp in unison.

“Who’s up there?” the voice echoed off the stone walls. “If that’s you, Dunbar, I’ll have the cops here in five minutes! You’ve sabotaged my production for the last time!”



5

LESCHIFF EXPLAINS

REALIZING THEY HAD no place to hide, the boys could only stand there, red-faced, as a prim, sophisticated man in a neatly tailored suit and white silk scarf clattered up the steps.

When he saw the boys, the thin man stiffened, then glared at the boys. “What are you boys doing up here?” he demanded in a voice that sounded distinctly French. He twitched his pencil-thin mustache and ran a carefully manicured hand along its pointed ends.

“Can’t you read? This level is off limits! Did Dunbar send you? Well ---- speak up, then!”

“We were just looking for a restroom,” said Jupe quickly. “We don’t know anyone named Dunbar, sir, but someone *is* hiding just behind that door!”

The Frenchman eyed the boys shrewdly, then produced a large ring of keys from his pocket. He approached the door and called out. “You’ve ten seconds to unlock the door and come out, Dunbar.”

The well-dressed man waited for a moment, then put a key in the lock and threw open the door.

The Three Investigators were prepared to see the man named Dunbar come charging out of the room, but what they saw instead made their jaws drop in shock!

A full-grown lion stood face to face with the boys - its shaggy mane and green eyes surrounded a gaping jaw full of deadly teeth!

“Gleeps!” cried Pete, “a lion!” The tall boy lept for the stairs, followed closely by Bob. But Jupiter stood his ground, closely watching the Frenchman. The man with the pencil mustache and tailored suit stood before the lion with a hand on his hip, then allowed himself a slight chuckle.

The absurdity of the situation seemed to alter the Frenchman’s gruff demeanor. He smiled slightly and patted the lion on the head. “I assure you Sasha is quite tame,” he said, “the old fellow’s hunting days are long past.”

“He’s stuffed!” Bob said with relief.

“That doesn’t make me feel any better about his teeth,” said Pete. “He still looks plenty hungry to me!”

Jupiter stepped to the doorway and looked inside. The room was full of a wild assortment of oddities ---- from airplane propellers to Egyptian mummy cases to clown costumes. With his background in show business, he knew that he was looking into the theater’s prop room.

“Your production company has a vast array of props,” the stocky boy said with admiration, picking up a long sword with a ruby in the hilt that stood by the door. “Many larger theaters would be envious of your collection.”

The Frenchman glowed at the praise and ran a finger along his mustache. “The Mission Temple prides itself with its long and colorful history. Many people have called the Mission home, and each has left a part of its history behind. Everything you see here is a remnant of the past ---- a memento of a grand old age when live entertainment was

truly a spectacle to behold.”

Deciding to take advantage of the Frenchman’s improved attitude, Jupiter cleared his throat and produced one of The Three Investigator’s business cards.

“Sir, if the Dunbar Construction company is harassing your theater, perhaps The Three Investigators could be of service to you. We’ve already been engaged by a client - a Mr. Eldridge that lives just behind the theater - but since our investigation centers around your building, we’d be happy to look into your problem as well. It’s quite possible the two cases are connected.”

The Frenchman studied the card, then looked at the boys carefully ---- as if trying to decided whether or not to take them seriously.

Jupiter produced another card from his pocket and handed it to him. “I assure you we are quite legitimate detectives,” he added. The card read:

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

*(Signed) Samuel Reynolds
Chief of Police*

The sophisticated man in the silk scarf read the card with a raised eyebrow. “And just what interest does Mr. Eldridge have in my building?”

“He claims to have seen an apparition upon the exterior of the Mission ---- Mr. . . .”

“LeSchiff. Anton LeSchiff,” said the Frenchman. Pray tell, what kind of apparition?”

“From his attic window, Mr. Eldridge said he watched one of the gargoyles on the rear of the building begin prowling about. I know it sounds far-fetched, but he is really quite shaken by it, sir,” Jupiter explained.

Anton LeSchiff’s brow furrowed as he considered Jupe’s words. “Hmmm . . . far-fetched is an understatement, young man. But perhaps it’s not as crazy as it sounds. I have a more likely scenario explaining Mr. Eldridge’s restless gargoyle.”

“You think someone from Dunbar Construction has been prowling about the Mission, trying to break in?” guessed Bob.

“I do,” said LeSchiff seriously. “You see, there was an error with the property line when the Mission was first constructed all those years ago. The West side of the building actually overlaps the neighboring lot ---- Dunbar’s lot ---- by twenty feet. Dunbar has razed the house on his lot and begun work on a bank, and he claims he needs the space occupied by the Mission for parking. Preposterous as it may sound, the case has actually gone back in forth in the circuit courts for the past six months!”

LeSchiff’s face grew red as he related this last piece of information. “When Dunbar had secured a brief victory a week ago, he wasted no time in smashing our walls. Fortunately I was able to acquire an injunction and halt his destruction! The man’s a brute and will stop at nothing to get his way.”

Jupiter was tugging at his bottom lip again. “You

indicated that Dunbar was responsible for sabotaging your production. Do you have any proof?"

LeSchiff shook his head. "Unfortunately, no. But who else could it be? Tools have gone missing, lighting has come loose above the stage, a brick was dislodged and nearly hit an actor on the head! Something is afoot here, and I'll eat my scarf if Carl Dunbar isn't behind it all! He wants to make it seem as if the Mission isn't safe ---- that it should be condemned!"

"This should be an easy case to crack," said Pete confidently. "Simple surveillance ought to do the trick. I'm guessing that once Dunbar's cronies are caught trying to break into your building, Mr. Eldridge will stop seeing gargoyles going for midnight strolls."

"Pete may be right," Jupiter agreed. "With your cooperation, Mr. LeSchiff, we could get proof of Dunbar breaking and entering, or at least trespassing, and wrap up Mr. Eldridge's case at the same time."

LeSchiff stopped pacing and considered Jupe's proposition. After a moment, he smiled and nodded in agreement. "Very well. You are young, but you are determined ---- I admire that. Perhaps together we can get to the bottom of this. I will provide you with a key to the service entrance door in the back of the building. When can you begin?"

Jupiter explained that they had to finish school, but would return in a week's time.

"Then it's settled," said Anton LeSchiff. "I will talk to you in precisely one week. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must return to my dress rehearsal."

“One more thing,” said Jupe quickly. “What can you tell us about Mr. Eldridge’s son: Archie Eldridge?”

LeSchiff fingered his mustache once more and sighed heavily. “Archie has great spirit, but I’m afraid he’ll never cut it as an actor. He’s quite an athlete, and very agile, so we give him roles that require a certain dexterity. But he forgets lines. And the lines he *does* remember are delivered poorly and without feeling. A nice young man, but no actor by any means.”

The boys thanked Mr. LeSchiff and stepped out of the gloomy Mission Temple and into the bright sunshine. Bob and Pete followed Jupe as he walked around the enormous yellow wrecking machine parked at the side of the building. Across the way, construction workers labored at raising the walls of Dunbar’s bank.

“Boy, I wish all cases were this easy,” said Pete as they began walking back to Price Eldridge’s house. “We return in a week with some binoculars and a camera, and bingo - that’s that!”

“Not me,” Bob reminded him, “I’ll be in Hollywood.”

“Oh yeah,” said Pete. “Looks like it’ll just be us two, Jupe.” But Jupiter didn’t respond. He seemed to be staring at a large trailer-home that served as a temporary office for the Dunbar Construction company.

“What is it, Jupe?” asked Bob. “You’ve got that look on your face that says you’ve just found a clue.”

“It may or may not be a clue,” said Jupe cryptically, “but it certainly is intriguing.”

“What do you mean?” Pete demanded.

Jupiter pointed to the Dunbar trailer-office that was

situated next to the demolished house. “What would you say,” the stocky boy said impressively, “if I told you I just saw Mr. Eldridge’s cantankerous tenant, Trisha Colgate, enter into the Dunbar Construction trailer-home that is parked over there?”

Pete and Bob looked at their friend with wide eyes. “Do you suppose she’s helping Dunbar?” cried Bob.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Jupe grinned.

Following Jupe’s lead, the three boys crept up to the side of the trailer-office and ducked beneath the single window. They raised their heads slowly to peer inside ---- but just before they could, a heavy hand fell on Bob and Pete’s shoulders!

6

A CASE ON HOLD

THE BOYS NEARLY CRIED OUT as they whirled to face their attacker. They smiled sheepishly when they saw it was only Konrad.

“Jeepers, Konrad ----- you almost gave me a heart attack!” Pete hissed.

“It is getting late, Jupe,” Konrad said worriedly. He pointed at his wristwatch. “Mrs. Jones will be mad we’ve been away so long. We should get back now, hokay?”

The boys all breathed a sigh of relief, and Jupe nodded reluctantly at the big Bavarian. “Okay, Konrad, you’re probably right. As much as I hate to admit it, this case is just going to have to wait until school lets out.”

Jupiter chanced one more quick look in the window of the trailer. Inside the office, Trisha Colgate appeared to be having a heated discussion with a rugged looking man in a cowboy hat, presumably Carl Dunbar. His face was covered in a growth of whiskers, and his western boots rested casually upon a cluttered desk.

Aside from the messy desk, the rest of the trailer-office was as nicely furnished as any modern home. The large cherry desk rested on designer rugs, a ceiling fan turned lazily from the ceiling, and an old movie poster in an

expensive frame hung above the mock fireplace.

Jupe watched with interest as the construction man fidgeted with the bolo around his neck. Dunbar smiled ruefully as Miss Colgate pointed a finger and shouted at him.

Jupe strained to hear what was being said, but Konrad tapped him on the shoulder once more.

“Jupe . . .”

The stocky First Investigator scowled. He hated putting a mystery on hold more than anything in the world. “All right, all right,” he moaned.

The group trudged back to Price Eldridge’s house. Once at the retired pilot’s home, they told him of what they had learned, and then promised to return in a week’s time.

Jupiter scribbled the phone number to their headquarters on the back of a business card and handed it to Mr. Eldridge. “Be sure to call us if you see any strange activity again,” he instructed.

“That’s a call I hope I don’t have to make,” Mr. Eldridge said heavily.

“That makes two of us,” Pete declared.

Once they had all piled into the salvage yard’s truck, Konrad steered them onto the freeway and back toward Rocky Beach.

Jupiter consulted Bob’s notebook to get an overview of the case. He studied it, pinching his lower lip.

“Here’s where we stand so far,” the First Investigator began. “Price Eldridge, who by his own admission has very poor eyesight, claims to see a gargoyle moving about the rooftop of the Mission Temple . . .”

“Do you think he might be seeing things?” Pete

interrupted.

Jupiter frowned. "I don't doubt that he's sincere about what he saw, but the fact remains he *was* forced into early retirement because of his vision. And the Mission Temple isn't exactly right next door to his house."

"One of his tenants," the stocky boy continued, "Harry Watson, never leaves his room and doesn't seem capable of sabotage. Another tenant, Trisha Colgate, has a shady past and appears to know Carl Dunbar personally. The last tenant is Mr. Eldridge's own son, Archie. He's an eccentric wanderer who doesn't take life too seriously."

"And Dunbar has a motive for wanting to sabotage the Mission's dinner theater," Bob pointed out. "He wants to use the land for a parking lot."

"Correct," Jupe agreed. "The Mission's director, Mr. LeSchiff, thinks Dunbar is behind it all. And there may be others working for Dunbar that are involved somehow. I only wish we didn't have to wait a week to find out!"

"You're forgetting one important point, First," Pete said darkly.

"What's that, Pete?" asked Jupiter.

"That there just might be a real live gargoyle!"

The next week crawled by at a snail's pace for The Three Investigators. They itched to get back at the case - especially Jupiter, but were forced to concentrate on their studies for school finals. In the evenings they kept busy at the salvage yard, working late into the night repairing junk in Jupe's workshop, all the while keeping an eye on the red light that signaled a telephone call from Mr. Eldridge.

It was midweek before the call came. Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus had just walked over to the house for the night, leaving Jupe to lock up the yard. He had continued working by flashlight, wanting to get the inventory done before school let out ---- and the case resumed. He was sorting through a large box of plaster lawn ornaments, jotting down numbers on a clipboard, when the blinking red light caught his eye.

He instantly dropped everything and made a bee-line for headquarters. Letting himself in through Door Four, one of the quickest entrances inside, he snatched up the phone.

“The Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking!”

The voice of Price Eldridge sputtered on the other end of the line. “I - I’ve s-s-seen it again! Just now ---- I’ve got it on film!”

Jupiter’s eyes went wide. “Say that again,” he demanded. “You say you captured the gargoyle on film?”

“Yes!” Eldridge said shakily. “I happened to be in my bedroom, loading a fresh reel of film into my eight millimeter camera so that I might record some of Archie’s performance this weekend, when I s-s-saw *it* . . .”

Jupiter’s heart was racing. “What happened next? What did the creature do?”

The retired pilot faltered, as if trying to find the right words. “Well, it was dark. It was lit only by the street lamps from the alley. I won’t even know if it turns out until I have the film developed tomorrow. B-but from what I can tell, the thing began moving around, and then . . . and then . . .”

“Yes?” Jupiter urged him on, “and then what?”

“And then it completely vanished!”

7

A NEAR SIGHT

JUPITER HARDLY SLEPT a wink that night. He lay in bed thinking about Price Eldridge's phone call, and how he was going to manage concentrating on school for the next two days. When he did sleep, his dreams were filled with visions of menacing gargoyles. They chased him over fog shrouded rooftops, as he barely escaped their grasping claws.

Finally it was Friday, and the last tests had been taken. Bob went home to pack a bag for his trip to Hollywood, and Pete bicycled with Jupe to the Jones Salvage Yard. Bob had arranged for his father to pick him up at the junkyard when it was time to go. The small boy coasted between the big iron gates, carefully balancing his large knapsack between his handlebars.

Uncle Titus sat at a large pipe organ that was stored beneath a section of roofing beside the office. Titus Jones had worked briefly for a carnival in his youth, and had refused to sell the instrument when it had come in as junk - despite Aunt Mathilda's stern protests. Instead, he had repaired it. When he was feeling particularly mirthful, he boomed out playful compositions, to the wonder of the customers in the yard, and to the annoyance of his wife!

He hit the last teeth-rattling chords of his current

number and smiled at Bob.

“Good day to you, young Andrews. I suppose you’re looking for those two ne’re-do-well’s?”

“Yes sir,” Bob grinned.

Uncle Titus jerked a thumb to the corner of the yard and chuckled, his eyes twinkling merrily. “I guess you know just where to go. With as much time as Jupiter spends in his workshop, I might as well move his bed in there!”

Bob stowed his bag in the yard’s office and then went to join his friends inside headquarters.

When his head popped up through Tunnel Two, Jupiter rapped his knuckles on the desk. “I now call this meeting to order.”

“What’s going on, Jupe?” asked Bob. “Has Mr. Eldridge seen the gargoyle again?”

“Indeed, he *has* seen it again, Records,” Jupiter confirmed. “In fact . . .” he paused dramatically, “Mr. Eldridge claims to have caught the phenomenon on film!”

Pete gulped. “You - you mean he’s actually got a picture of the monster?”

Jupiter grinned and leaned back in his chair. “We’ll find out today when we get there. He’s having a friend develop the film as we speak. It should be done by the time we get to Santa Barbara.”

Bob looked disappointed. “Gosh, I’d really like to see that film, but my dad will be coming to pick me up any time now.”

At that moment, Aunt Mathilda’s voice rang out from across the salvage yard. “Bob Andrews! Come out from behind all that junk! Your father is here for you!”

“Don’t worry, Bob,” said Jupe, trying to cheer his friend up, “it’s probably just as Pete said ---- a simple surveillance case.”

The stocky boy jotted down Price Eldridge’s phone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to Bob. “I’ve made arrangements for Pete and me to stay over at Mr. Eldridge’s for the weekend. Call us when you get the chance and we’ll keep you abreast of the situation.”

Pete looked at Jupe skeptically. “If Worthington’s not driving us to Santa Barbara, how are we going to get there? Aunt Mathilda’s not going to give up Hans and Konrad for the weekend!”

Jupe pulled two tickets from his back pocket and handed one to Pete. “I took the liberty of stopping by the bus station this morning. I had to get an advance on our paychecks from Uncle Titus to pay for them, but this way we won’t have to worry about transportation for the rest of the case.”

Pete sighed as the boys exited the trailer through Tunnel Two. “Why do I get the feeling I’ll be working at the salvage yard until I’m eighty years old?”

The boys said hello to Bob’s father when they reached the front gates. Other than his brown mustache, Mr. Andrews was like a taller version of his son. In his breast pocket were several pens and a small tape recorder, and behind his glasses were friendly eyes.

“There you are, son,” he said. “Grab your bag - we have to hurry. I’ve lined up an interview with Madeline Bainbridge today, but we have to be in Hollywood by noon. You don’t want to keep Ms. Bainbridge waiting!”

Bob parked his bicycle behind the salvage yard's office and retrieved his duffel bag from inside. When he had stuffed his bag in the trunk of his father's car, he waved goodbye to his chums.

"I'll call you tonight!" he called out from the window as the car pulled away from the curb.

Pete and Jupiter waved to their friend, then grabbed their own bags. "We'll leave our bicycles here and walk to the bus station," Jupiter instructed. "It's only a few blocks away."

Once at the station, they boarded their bus and, after an uneventful trip, were deposited at the station in Santa Barbara. Jupiter had called Price Eldridge before leaving Rocky Beach, and the retired pilot waved at them now from across the crowded bus terminal. He was standing on the platform with another man who had horn-rimmed glasses, long brown wavy hair, and was smoking a pipe. The boys smiled when they saw the older man was accompanied by their friend John Crowe, the mystery writer.

"Hello, fellows," the famous author grinned. "Glad to see you again. But where's Bob?"

Jupiter explained that their partner was on assignment with his father in Hollywood.

"Well, thank heavens the two of you made it," Eldridge sighed. "I've got the film developed but haven't been able to bring myself to watch it alone. In fact, I've been so upset by that darned creature I had to ask John to come over and keep me company!"

The boys tossed their bags into the trunk of Eldridge's car. John Crowe sat in the front seat while Jupe

and Pete climbed into the back. They listened to the gray-haired man chatter nervously as he drove. Jupiter observed that at times the retired pilot seemed to have trouble seeing stop signs and other posted markings along their route.

Although he was wearing his thick eyeglasses, Mr. Eldridge squinted his eyes to see where he was going - even running a stop sign at one point!

When the older man stopped at a gas station to fill up his car, Jupiter turned in his seat to face Pete and Mr. Crowe.

"I don't have high hopes for this film we're about to see, gentlemen."

"You're telling me!" Pete moaned. "He can't even see a stop sign ---- how's he supposed to see something on a building fifty yards away?"

John Crowe nodded in agreement. "My old friend may have observed some kind of movement at the Mission Temple, but I'll be very surprised if it turns out to be a gargoyle he captured on film."

Presently, Mr. Eldridge returned. He was carrying a small grocery bag and two bottles of soda, which he gave to the boys. "I'm afraid I don't have much in the house for youngsters like yourselves," he explained. "I thought I'd better get some soda and chips. Now let's get home and see that film, eh?"

8

THE GARGOYLE MOVES

WHEN THEY FINALLY reached the old Victorian house, Price Eldridge guided the party into the parlor where he had set up a small projector and screen. He threaded the film into the machine as Pete drew the curtains closed. When all was ready, Jupe clicked off the lights and the film began to roll.

“Hey ---- what’s going on in here?” Archie Eldridge said, sticking his head in the door of the darkened parlor and making Pete jump in his seat. “I heard voices ---- thought I better check it out.”

“We’re just about to watch a film I recorded last night of that creature I was telling you about,” his father explained. “Have a look for yourself.”

Archie shrugged his shoulders and stepped inside the room. “Why not?” he smiled happily. “With your eyes, Pop, you probably filmed a raccoon or something.”

“Shhhh ---- it’s starting,” his father hissed.

The first few seconds of the film were very shaky, and appeared to be inside Mr. Eldridge’s bedroom. His recorded voice, quivering with excitement and fear, narrated the events as they unfolded.

“... I see it ... out there on the Mission ... I ... I’m going to try to get it on film ...”

Pete and Jupiter watched in fascination as the camera zoomed in on the rear facade of the Mission Temple. Eldridge's harrowing narration continued: "I can't tell what it is . . . not even sure if this film will turn out . . . but there is definitely *something* out there!"

Even though the boys had doubted the veracity of Mr. Eldridge's claims just moments before, they soon found themselves sitting on the edge of their seats, gripped by the action unfolding on the small screen.

". . . there! There it is . . . it's moving . . ." Mr. Eldridge's taped voice was croaking.

Jupe, Pete, Archie, and John Crowe watched the grainy image in awe. The film, taken at night, was of poor quality ---- but the image was still quite convincing. One of the grotesque gargoyles appeared to slowly slip behind the low wall of the Mission's huge third story balcony. It then reappeared and began scaling down the side of the building like a giant spider ---- its long claws searching for footholds.

Mr. Eldridge's recorded voice was shaking with fear. ". . . It's going down the side of the building . . . It seems to be stopping now . . . unbelievable . . ."

Jupiter noticed the camera's movements were getting increasingly jerky and agitated, and he imagined the terror that must have been gripping the old pilot as he filmed this bizarre scene.

". . . Not sure what it's doing . . . seems to have stopped on the side of the building . . . Wait! Wait! I can't believe it . . . It's . . . It's gone!"

Jupiter and Pete looked at each other in shock, then stared once more at the screen. It appeared to be true! The



camera panned back and forth across the entire back side of the Mission Temple. Where there once was a gargoyle ---- there was now nothing.

The inhuman creature had vanished into thin air!

The film projector made a ‘flick, flick, flick, flick . . .’ sound as the reel ended. Pete gulped and quickly turned on the lights, then whisked open the curtains. “That’s better,” he said shakily. “After seeing that film I want to turn on every light in the house!”

Their elderly host threaded the film back into the projector and began rewinding the reel. “Now you know how I felt while I was filming, Pete. I hardly slept a wink last night. I kept thinking that horrible beast would be scaling up the side of *my* house next!”

Jupiter Jones pinched his bottom lip and frowned. “May we see it again, Mr. Eldridge? I’m convinced that not all is what it seems with this creature.”

“What do you mean, Jupiter?” asked John Crowe. “That thing on the film doesn’t look like any man or animal *I’ve* ever seen before.”

“I’ll buy a double helping of that!” Pete agreed. “My dad has done special effects for lots of monster movies in Hollywood, and that thing was scarier than most movies!”

Jupiter nodded. “I agree that the creature was quite realistic, Pete. However, I’m certain that if we look at the film hard enough, some flaw ---- some clue will present itself and suggest a course of action.”

Archie Eldridge chuckled and shook his head. “It looked like a shadow to me. Probably some trick of the moonlight.”

The tall young man stepped out of the room. “Pop, you need to get out more ---- go on a date with Miss Madigan down the street or something. Staying cooped up with your tenants is starting to drive you batty.” He chuckled again and marched up the stairs to his bedroom.

“He thinks I’m losing my marbles!” Mr. Eldridge fumed. “Well the thing on this film is definitely no shadow!” The elderly man reversed the reels on the projector in frustration, his jaw set firm.

“The film is ready. If you’d dim the lights, Pete,” he said tersely, starting the projector once more. “Here we go again. Lights, camera, action!”

9

HOLLYWOOD FRENZY

MEANWHILE, BACK IN HOLLYWOOD, Bob Andrews was having the time of his life. His father had been able to procure an official press-pass for him, and the father and son team moved around from one glitzy hotel to the next, attending an endless stream of press conferences.

Bob had sat in on some amazing interviews with several famous actors ---- each more incensed than the last that they were getting taken advantage of by the studios.

Bob was especially pleased to see some of the older generation of actors coming out to support the cause. He snapped pictures like crazy, knowing Jupe would be envious of his brush with stardom. One interview in particular that Bob was looking forward to was with the star of many horror movies from the silent era ---- Stephen Terrill.

Mr. Terrill had been involved in the boy's very first case as *The Three Investigators*, *The Secret of Terror Castle*. He had been living in disguise for many years, hiding from the public, until the boys' learned his secret. It was because of that meeting that the actor decided to come out of hiding and re-release his classic films to the movie-going public. Now he was one of the most vocal activists for the actors' union, demanding that they get fair treatment from the large

movie studios.

When Mr. Andrews had finished his last interview at a hotel called The Capricorn, Bob helped him pack up his gear so they could move on to the Stephen Terrill interview at The Topaz. They quickly shouldered their many bags of equipment and made their way across Wilshire Boulevard.

Hollywood was like a zoo! Limousines of every color paraded up and down the legendary street, and cameras flashed continuously as famous movie stars shook their fingers and berated the studio system.

When the father and son duo reached The Topaz, Bob saw a limousine that he recognized pulling up in front of the hotel. For this was no ordinary limousine! It was a Rolls-Royce of ancient vintage, with huge headlights the size of dinner plates, and a hood as long as a surfboard. The black body of the car was rather box-like, and all the trim on the car gleamed in gold-plated majesty.

When the car came to a stop, all heads turned to stare at the fabulous auto and the star it was transporting. A tall, powerfully built man in a neatly cut, gray chauffeur's suit hopped out of the front seat and strode briskly to the passenger's side, where he opened the back door. It was Worthington ---- the boy's personal chauffeur!

Bob waved enthusiastically. The elegant Englishman, ever the professional, only afforded Bob a quick wink.

Just then, another familiar face appeared from inside the car ---- it was Madeline Bainbridge, the reclusive actress the boys had helped on a previous case. Even though the elderly actress had silver hair, she still looked stunningly beautiful. Her face had hardly aged a day in the thirty years

since her last film, and her designer dress and wrap were exquisitely tailored. The crowd was hushed in awe as she swept up to the entrance of the hotel. Before she reached the front door she was surrounded by reporters, each eager to get a quote from the enigmatic starlet.

Bob could only grin. He knew something all those reporters did not ---- he had already met Miss Bainbridge personally, and, thanks to his father, he would be sitting in on her exclusive interview in just under an hour!

“I’ll be right back, Dad!” Bob said over his shoulder.

“Don’t stray too far,” his father warned, “we’re going inside in five minutes!”

Bob wanted to say hello to Worthington before the lanky chauffeur moved the gleaming Rolls down to the hotel’s underground parking garage.

Worthington was carefully polishing one of the massive headlights with his handkerchief when Bob tapped him on the shoulder.

“Ah, Master Andrews,” the chauffeur said in a crisp British accent, putting a finger to his lips as if he were thinking hard. “I deduce you’re on assignment with your father, while Master Jones and Master Crenshaw unravel a mystery elsewhere.”

Bob looked at his friend, wide-eyed. “Gosh, you’re getting good, Worthington! But how did you know about the case?”

Worthington chuckled and clapped Bob on the back. “I’m afraid my deductive skills are still quite primitive. You see, I called Mr. Gelbert at Rent-’N-Ride to check in and he told me that Jupiter had inquired about the Rolls.”

Bob laughed. "It's too bad you're busy here in Hollywood, Worthington. We could sure use you on this case ---- it's in Santa Barbara!"

"I've no doubt the case will be solved by The Three Investigators despite the considerable distance." Worthington tucked his handkerchief into his jacket pocket and tipped his hat to Bob. "And now if you'll excuse me, Master Andrews, I must attend to the auto."

"Sure thing, Worthington," said Bob. "It was good to see you!"

Bob jogged back to the hotel's front entrance and rejoined his father. "Let's check in and get set up for the big interview," Mr. Andrews said.

An hour later, Bob and his father were seated in a luxurious suite on the hotel's top floor. When the doors were finally swept open, Bob was surprised to see that Madeline Bainbridge was joined by Stephen Terrill. They both rose and shook each hand in turn.

"Hello, Bob!" Mr. Terrill said merrily. "Mr. Andrews. I hope you don't mind if I sit in on this interview."

"Not at all," Bob's father replied. "Having two distinguished actors in one interview ---- it must be my lucky day!"

The interview went off without a hitch. Madeline Bainbridge spoke eloquently and with conviction about actors and their right to a fair deal from the studios. Mr. Terrill chimed in from time to time to clarify a point or add his opinion on a subject. After an hour had passed, Mr. Andrews snapped his note pad shut and clicked off his mini tape recorder. The group relaxed and chatted casually.

“Gosh, I didn’t know there were so many things for actors to consider,” Bob said.

Stephen Terrill poured tea for everyone and offered Bob a plate of cookies. “Oh yes,” he nodded vigorously. “Everything associated with a movie production is of value these days. Why, even the cheapest of props are coveted by collectors and traded as if they were gold! I’ve seen posters for my movies bought and sold for thousands of dollars - and those are just pieces of paper! What bothers me is the fact that they have *my* name on them, *my* face, and yet I don’t see a nickel of the profits!”

“Wow!” Bob whistled. “Some people really pay thousands of dollars for an old movie poster? Wouldn’t they be better off investing their money in a bank?”

“But it is an investment!” Mr. Terrill pointed out. “It’s an investment in movie history. Some people will do anything for a piece of their favorite movie. That’s why the actors’ union is insisting on licensing agreements, where each actor will get a share of not only the movie, but any product associated with the film ---- be it posters, records, toys, or lunch boxes!”

Mr. Andrews looked at his watch and sighed. “As much as I would like to stay and visit, Bob and I really must be getting along to our next interview.”

They shook each actor’s hand once more and excused themselves from the room. When the day was over, Bob had a lot to think about. It was approaching nine o’clock when he decided to call Jupe in Santa Barbara and tell him of his exciting day.

Price Eldridge picked up the phone on the second

ring, and Bob waited patiently as the retired pilot went to fetch Jupiter.

When Jupe finally picked up the phone, Bob blurted out everything that had happened that day ---- he was afraid he might forget something if he didn't tell it as quickly as possible. He even related the conversation with Stephen Terrill about the movie memorabilia and how some people were nuts for old junk from movie sets.

When the small boy had finally finished, he waited for Jupe to reply. Knowing that Jupe was a movie buff, Bob had thought Jupe would be thrilled with his story. But when there was silence on the other end, Bob thought his friend had hung up.

“Jupe, are you still there?”

“I'm here, Records,” he replied quietly. “When do you think you'll be done in Hollywood?”

Bob thought for a moment. “Dad says we've got interviews all day tomorrow and a couple on Sunday. I guess I'll be back in Rocky Beach by Monday morning. Why do you ask?”

“Ramble and scramble to Santa Barbara when you get back to Rocky Beach,” he said excitedly. “Get Hans or Konrad to drive you. I think you've provided a breakthrough in the case!”

10

NIGHT OF THE BEAST

AFTER JUPITER HUNG UP the phone, he sat in the parlor for a long while, lost in thought. The old house seemed eerily still, each creak and groan of the ancient timbers seemed magnified in the stillness, and created an air of unease within the gloomy corridors.

Price Eldridge and John Crowe were at the Mission Temple watching Archie in a play. Harry Watson was hidden away in his room, and Trisha Colgate was silent for the moment, having no one to yell at.

Pete's voice finally stirred Jupe from his meditation.

"Hey, it's your turn to man the telescope ---- I'm starving!" In his knapsack, Jupiter had brought a small telescope that he had rebuilt at the salvage yard so he and Pete could keep the rear portion of the Mission Temple under surveillance. Pete was actually supposed to be keeping watch for another half an hour, but his stomach was telling him it was break time.

"I think Mr. Eldridge said something about leftover roast beef in the refrigerator," the tall boy said, heading toward the pantry.

He stopped when he saw Jupe's look of deep concentration. "Hey, did I miss a clue or something? You're

thinking so hard I can almost hear the gears spinning!”

“I just spoke to Bob on the phone,” the stocky boy replied. “Something he said got me thinking. Remember when Mr. LeSchiff showed us the Mission’s prop room?”

Pete looked confused. “Yeah, what of it?”

“He told us a lot of that stuff was quite old, some of it dating back to when the building was first built.”

“So there’s a bunch of old junk locked up in a room,” Pete replied. “Junk is junk if you ask me. No one would want to steal a musty smelling stuffed tiger!”

Jupiter rose from his seat and began pacing, pinching his lip. “But what if they *did*,” he persisted. “Look at Uncle Titus ---- he buys useless junk all the time and always ends up selling it for a profit! What if someone’s trying to break into the Temple to steal the props? I’ll bet there’s collectors out there who’d love to get their hands on some of that vintage vaudeville and circus stuff.”

Pete looked skeptical. “I don’t know, First. What would that have to do with a gargoyle that likes to go for moonlit strolls on the sides of buildings? And what about Dunbar and Trisha Colgate? It doesn’t seem like they’d need the money.”

“I’ll admit I haven’t worked out how those two tie into the puzzle,” Jupe admitted. “Although I’m not entirely convinced that *was* a gargoyle we saw on Mr. Eldridge’s film,” he said flatly. “It came from the same spot, but the picture was too fuzzy to make out exactly what or who it was. I think we need to pay another visit to Mr. LeSchiff tomorrow and see if any of his props have been stolen.”

“Fine,” said Pete, rubbing his belly, “now can we get

something to eat?"

Grinning, the two Investigators headed for the kitchen. They stopped short when they heard a voice speaking softly. Jupe pulled Pete back from the doorway and into a shadowy alcove just outside the pantry door. He pressed a finger to his lips.

"Trisha Colgate," he mouthed silently.

Pete nodded in understanding, then strained his ears to hear what was being said. She was speaking softly - Pete could barely make out the words. Then he realized that she was talking on the telephone.

"Can you hear what she's saying?" Jupe whispered.

Pete shook his head. "We need to get closer."

Jupiter risked a peek around the corner. Trisha Colgate, dressed in a loose-fitting black turtleneck sweater, sat on the far side of the kitchen with her back to the boys. She was hunched over the telephone and had a pencil in her hand. She seemed to be scribbling something on a note pad.

Jupe ducked back into the shadows. "The kitchen table has a long tablecloth," he breathed, "if you're quiet, you should be able to sneak underneath and listen in."

"Why me?" Pete hissed. "It's your plan!"

Jupiter rubbed his belly and Pete heard it rumble hungrily. He clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle the laughter that threatened to burst out, then dropped to his hands and knees and slinked around the corner.

"Try to bring back some roast beef," Jupe whispered.

Pete rolled his eyes, and, as stealthily as a cat, inched along the kitchen floor and disappeared beneath the oversized kitchen table's checkered tablecloth.

The athletic boy carefully negotiated a maze of table and chair legs until he was within a couple feet of Trisha Colgate's chair. He inched closer and closer, hardly daring to breath.

Just when he thought he was safe, a floorboard beneath his knees gave a slight creak. Pete held his breath and waited, his mind racing as he desperately tried to think of a plausible excuse for why he was eavesdropping from beneath the kitchen table.

"Hold on a second," Pete heard the woman mutter, "I think someone is listening." The tall boy bit his lip as he heard her set the phone down, then stand up and walk across the kitchen. Her feet were heading straight for Jupe's hiding place! He would be caught for sure!

Pete watched, helpless, as Miss Colgate stopped at the doorway and stuck her head around the corner. She paused for several agonizing seconds, listening for any sound, then walked back to the phone and began speaking again.

"False alarm," she said into the receiver, "stupid house is so creaky, I'm surprised it's still standing . . ."

Pete remained absolutely still and listened to the remainder of the conversation. It was boring chatter, and before long his knees began to throb. He hoped she would hang up the phone soon! Just then she said something that made his ears perk up.

"No . . . they're just kids . . . playing private eye. Archie told me. Something about the Temple . . . I wouldn't worry about it."

Suddenly, the pencil she was holding dropped to the floor and rolled underneath the table! Pete's eyes went

round as he saw her long, claw-like fingernails searching around for it. Her bony white hand inched closer and closer to Pete's own hands!

"Hold on a sec . . ." she said, "I dropped my pencil."

Thinking quickly, Pete nudged the pencil with his finger and rolled it within an inch of her hand. He wiped sweat from his brow when she finally hit upon it and snatched the pencil up.

"Yeah . . . I'm back. Go on. Sure, Carl . . . Uh, huh . . . Got it . . . Rocky Beach. I'll look into it . . . if we can't find them there we may have to dig holes for them anyway. Those three will look nice with the daisies!"

Pete gulped as he listened to the woman snicker nastily. He breathed a quiet sigh of relief when she finally hung up the phone. Pete nearly gave away his hiding place at the last second when she pushed her chair right into his knuckles. He stifled a cry, then listened as she tore off a piece of paper from the note pad and left the kitchen.

When he was sure she was gone, Pete scooted out from under the table and examined the note pad beside the phone. Using the same pencil that Miss Colgate had used moments before, Pete turned the pencil on its side, and, putting his index finger on the tip, shaded the area softly with a back and forth motion. Like magic, words indented into the page began to appear. They spelled:

Jones Salvage Yard!

Pete tore the piece of paper off and shoved it into his pocket, then raced out of the kitchen to find Jupiter.

When they had reconvened at the telescope in Mr.

Eldridge's bedroom, Pete showed Jupe the note and related what Trisha Colgate had said to Carl Dunbar on the phone, especially the part about pushing up daisies!

Jupiter pinched his lip and paced about the room.

"Very interesting," he murmured. "I wonder how they found out we're from Rocky Beach." He sat back down at the telescope and scanned the back of the Mission Temple, still thinking aloud. "I suppose Mr. Eldridge could have told Archie, and Archie could have told Miss Colgate. Still . . . Aha!"

"What do you see?" asked Pete.

"It looks like the play has let out. Here comes Mr. Eldridge and Mr. Crowe now." The stocky boy moved aside so Pete could look through the viewfinder. Pete watched as the two men crossed the darkened alley and let themselves in through the fence in the back yard. They walked toward the back of the house, and then Pete heard them enter through the back door.

"It's nearing ten o'clock," Jupiter announced. "Approximately the time Mr. Eldridge has spotted the creature on each occasion. If we're lucky we'll see some activity tonight!"

"Your opinion is not shared by the Second Investigator," Pete scowled.

For another hour Jupe and Pete scanned the back of the Mission Temple, looking for any sign of the creature. At eleven o'clock Pete yawned and stretched in his chair. He wondered how long Jupe was planning on continuing their stake-out. Knowing the First Investigator, it was likely to be an all night event.

Price Eldridge knocked softly on the door and entered. "I'm going to hit the sack, boys. I'll be sleeping on the love-seat in the parlor. Wake me if you see anything."

The boys promised they would and said good night. Jupiter extinguished the light in the bedroom and closed the curtains ---- leaving just enough space for the end of the telescope to protrude. "We want the creature, or whatever it is, to think that Mr. Eldridge has retired for the evening in his bedroom, just like normal."

After a half an hour had passed, Jupe stretched and yawned. "You watch for awhile. I'm going to get a soda from the kitchen."

"See if you can scrounge up some cookies too," said Pete, licking his lips.

Jupe grinned and stepped out into the hallway. He turned to descend the stairs when something made him stop. He heard whispering coming from the other end of the hallway! Moving slowly, the stocky investigator eased his way across the carpeted hall ---- he didn't want a creaky floorboard to betray him like Pete had in the kitchen!

He stopped when he got to Archie Eldridge's room. Hushed voices emanated from the other side of the door, but they were too low for him to make out the words.

Just then Jupe noticed the last door at the end of the hall was slightly ajar. It was the door to Harry Watson's room. He debated on whether he should go back for Pete or carry on, and decided that this may be his only chance to see what was inside the quiet delivery man's room.

Moving slowly, the First Investigator tip-toed up to the door and peered inside. A single bedside lamp burned by

the open window, casting the room in deep shadows. Jupe sniffed. A faint chemical odor hung in the air. It reminded him of the solution Bob used to develop his photographs back at headquarters.

Jupiter's brow furrowed when he observed all the strange equipment and complex machinery that had been crammed into Watson's small room. Most of the equipment was unfamiliar to him, but he could guess what it was for. It was photographic equipment! A large glass case that could be illuminated by a bright light bulb sat opposite an oversized, technical camera. A multitude of solutions and bottled chemicals lined his shelves.

The room was also cluttered with various canisters of film and other photographic apparatus, as well as the same strange shoebox sized boxes that Jupiter had picked up on the front porch. A stack of the boxes sat by the door. Jupiter picked one up and examined it. It was wrapped in a soft white shipping paper with a twine string tied around it. It was addressed to Harry Watson, but there was no return address. Jupiter ran his fingers over the paper. There was something strange about the boxes, but he couldn't decide what it was.

The stocky boy shook the package. It appeared to be empty. Jupiter looked puzzled. Why would someone be sending Mr. Watson empty boxes? And why wasn't the delivery man opening any of the packages? There must have been twenty of the same boxes in the room ---- all unopened!

Jupiter returned the box to its place, then took one last glance around the room. On the nightstand were several different magazines and periodicals on collecting antiques.

More of the same magazines were stacked by the door.

The First Investigator ducked out of Watson's room and returned to Archie's, pressing his ear to the door. The voices had stopped. He listened for a few more seconds and then crept back to Price Eldridge's darkened bedroom.

"Something's going on, Second," he hissed lowly. "Mr. Watson is some kind of film enthusiast ---- he's got all kinds of strange photographic equipment in his room, and more of those empty packages he was carrying. But he's not in there now and Archie is whispering to someone."

"Something's going on here, too," Pete replied. "There's something blocking my view from the telescope. It wasn't there a second ago. Take a look for yourself."

Jupiter stepped up to the telescope and peered through the viewfinder. Where he should have spied the two gargoyles on the Mission, he now saw only blackness.

"There's something obstructing the lens all right," he murmured, "let's take a look."

Pete whisked open the curtains and cried out in alarm. He lurched backward and stumbled over Jupiter, sending them both crashing to the floor in a tangle of arms and legs.

Staring at them from the other side of the window was the hideous stone face of the gargoyle! The grotesque creature pointed a long, black claw at them and grinned horribly, then leapt from sight!

11

JUPITER MAKES OBSERVATIONS

“DID YOU SEE THAT?” Pete cried.

“I ---- I’m not sure *what* I saw,” Jupiter stammered, picking himself up from the floor. The round-faced boy helped Pete up, then threw open the window and stuck his head outside.

“Are you crazy?” Pete howled. “What if Konrad is right? I don’t want a gargoyle having me for a midnight snack!”

Jupiter ignored Pete’s protests and continued his examination of the rooftop.

“There’s a ledge here that provides access to each bedroom on this side of the house,” Jupe said. “Whoever that was could be hiding out in Miss Colgate’s or Mr. Watson’s bedroom. Watson’s window was open when I looked inside.”

Pete joined Jupiter at the window and cautiously peered out. “Maybe he’s the gargoyle!”

Suddenly there was a sharp knock at the door. Without waiting for a reply, Trisha Colgate opened the door and pushed up the sleeves to her black sweater. The red lipstick on her lips was turned down in an accusing sneer. She stood with her arms crossed, glaring at the boys.

“Listen you two ---- in case you haven’t noticed, some of us are trying to sleep,” she growled. “Eldridge may let you run around playing cops and robbers, but not me. So you better put a lid on it before I call the cops and have you arrested for disturbing the peace!”

Before the boys could say a word, she turned on her high heels and marched back to her room, slamming the door.

“I’m guessing she’s not a morning person,” Pete said lamely. “What a grouch!”

“She lied,” Jupiter said, returning to the telescope. He swiveled the instrument from side to side, scanning for any movement outside.

“She lied about sleeping?” Pete asked. “She sure seemed pretty cranky to me!”

Without taking his eye from the viewfinder, Jupe explained. “How many women go to bed in their clothes? For that matter, how many go to bed without taking off their make-up? If you’ll recall, she still had on her red lipstick. I also observed that she was still wearing her shoes and that they were damp and had bits of grass stuck to them - indicating she has been outside recently.”

Pete stared at his partner wide-eyed. “You saw all that from her yelling at us?”

“A good detective must train him or herself to observe even the smallest of details,” Jupiter lectured. “You never know what may be important later on.”

“Gosh,” Pete said, “I guess I did see all those things!”

“It just takes practice,” Jupiter said. Suddenly he sat up straight and grabbed the telescope to steady it. “Wait! I see someone moving about in the garden. Come on ----

now's our chance to catch the gargoyle red-handed!"

Before Pete could object, Jupe grabbed a flashlight and was out the door - bounding down the steps. As Pete raced after his partner, Mr. Eldridge poked his head out from the parlor door.

"What's going on?" he asked groggily, tying his robe around his waist. "Has something happened?"

Not wanting to frighten the aging pilot, Pete decided not to mention anything about the gargoyle. "Jupe saw someone prowling about in the garden. We're going to see if we can catch him!"

Price Eldridge pulled on his slippers and followed Pete. "That could be dangerous. Perhaps I should call the police!"

"There's no time. Don't worry, sir," Pete assured him as they hurried after Jupiter, "we've done this dozens of times."

The two raced out the back door and quickly caught up with Jupiter at the rear of the house. The stocky boy pointed a finger and whispered.

"Over there by the rose bushes. Someone's heading toward the Temple. Quick ---- we've no time to lose!"

In a flash Jupiter was away and charging after the intruder. Pete, who was naturally more athletic and the fastest runner of the boys, quickly overtook Jupe and leaped for the intruder's legs in a flying tackle.

The two went tumbling to the dew-covered grass. The intruder fought like a bull, cursing and yelling. He caught a meaty fist on Pete's chin and sent the boy sprawling.

As Jupe and Price Eldridge caught up, Jupe shined his flashlight on the face of the mystery man.

“Carl Dunbar!” Eldridge gasped. “What’s the meaning of this? Why are you prowling about on my property?”

The heavy-set construction man held his hand up to shield his eyes from the glare of the flashlight. Glowering, he slowly picked himself up from the ground, wiping the grass and dirt from his clothes.

“You’re lucky I don’t sue!” he bellowed. “That darn kid nearly broke my neck!”

Mr. Eldridge suddenly remembered Pete and rushed over to help him up. “My goodness! Are you okay, Pete?”

Slightly dazed, Pete stood up and rubbed his jaw. “I’ll live. He just clipped me on the chin.”

Jupiter held himself up straight and spoke in a determined, confident voice. “I would be interested in hearing your case, Mr. Dunbar. Particularly when you explain to the judge why you were lurking in Mr. Eldridge’s garden at midnight.”

“Why, you no-good kid!” Dunbar raged, snatching up his cowboy hat from the grass. “I know who you are. That Frenchman has hired you to spy on me. Well listen good, Fatso ---- if I catch you and your pals on my property, you’ll all end up in jail!”

The big construction man jammed his hat down on his head and gruffly pulled the lapels of his jacket. “I’m warning you boys fair and square,” he said, pointing a threatening finger at Jupiter, “don’t mess with me. You’ll get more trouble than you bargained for!”

With one last menacing glare, Carl Dunbar marched off to his trailer-office at the construction site next door to the Mission Temple.

“Golly, that fellow sure means business,” Pete gulped.

Jupiter turned to Price Eldridge. The elderly pilot looked shaken and pale. “I’m sure Mr. Dunbar’s demeanor is all an act sir. It’s how he gets his way. He bullies people and uses scare tactics meant to intimidate.”

Eldridge pulled his robe tight and began walking back to his house. “I just don’t know, boys,” he said shakily. “This may be too big for you. Too dangerous. I think it’s time I called the police in.”

“But what about the gargoyle, sir?” Jupe pointed out. “How will you explain that? We saw it again tonight. The same night we catch Mr. Dunbar in your garden. I think we’re very close to solving this case, sir. In fact, I think I know why Mr. Dunbar was out here.”

“You do?” Mr. Eldridge said in surprise.

Jupiter turned to Pete. “Who’s the only other person we know for a fact was outside in the wet grass tonight?”

Pete snapped his fingers as he followed Jupiter’s line of thought. “Trisha Colgate was outside! Her shoes were wet and had grass on them.”

Jupiter nodded smugly. “That’s the second time we’ve seen Miss Colgate in the company of Mr. Dunbar. At first it seemed to have little to do with this case, but with tonight’s developments it may bear closer scrutiny.”

Price Eldridge led the boys into his house through the back door. He began fixing himself some tea to calm his nerves. “Well, it *is* rather suspicious . . .” Eldridge said

slowly. “Still ---- it seems awfully dangerous for you boys.”

“If you’d like you can call Mr. Crowe tomorrow,” Pete volunteered. “I’m sure he would vouch for us. We’ve been on a lot tougher cases than this. He knows that we can handle ourselves.”

Eldridge sat down at the kitchen table and smiled at Jupiter and Pete. “Perhaps that’s just what I’ll do, Pete. I would very much like John’s advice right now anyway.”

“In the meantime,” Jupiter said, “one of us will keep watch at all times tonight ---- in case our gargoyle decides to make another appearance!”

12

MYSTERIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

BOB ANDREWS AWOKED early in his hotel room bed and dressed quickly. He stuffed his clothes in his bag and gathered up his camera, notepad, and film.

Jupiter's mysterious message about the case had been on his mind for the entire evening the night before. Over a late dinner of pizza in their hotel room, his father had seen how absorbed Bob was with the case. Finally, after he had repeated a question to Bob three times, Mr. Andrews chuckled.

"You'd rather be in Santa Barbara, right?"

"Huh ----" Bob replied blankly.

Bill Andrews took his pipe from between his teeth and grinned. "I'm not such a bad detective myself, you know. By observing your mannerisms, I've deduced that your thoughts are on The Three Investigator's gargoyles case in Santa Barbara. Am I right?"

Bob looked at his father with respect. "Gosh, that's right, Dad. But how did you know?"

"Easy," Mr. Andrews said. "You haven't said a word since you got off the phone with Jupiter. And do you know what else I've deduced?"

Bob shook his head.

“That The Three Investigators aren’t really The Three Investigators if there’s only two investigators on the case.” Mr. Andrews got up from his chair and clapped Bob on the shoulder.

“I know how seriously you and Pete and Jupiter take your detective firm, so here’s what I propose. I’ve got another long day of boring interviews with rich Hollywood actors lined up for tomorrow. You can either stay here and be bored silly with me, or you can catch the early bus back to Rocky Beach tomorrow morning.”

Bob’s eyes lit up. “Golly, are you sure Dad?”

Mr. Andrews laughed and nodded his head. “I’ve got a hunch that you’ll find more excitement in Santa Barbara than you’ll find following your old man around in Tinseltown.”

“Gee, thanks dad,” Bob grinned.

The next morning, before the sun had even come up, Bob Andrews was on a bus headed for Rocky Beach. The small bus-stop was only a few blocks from Jupiter’s house, so Bob decided to walk over to the salvage yard and retrieve his bicycle. Then he could head home, pack some fresh clothes and catch the next bus to Santa Barbara.

As was usually the case in the coastal town, early morning fog hung low to the ground as Bob approached the Jones Salvage Yard. The sun was just starting to appear over the horizon, and Bob knew it would be too early for the large iron front gates to be unlocked.

He headed over to Blue Gate Two ---- the nearest secret entrance in the yard’s tall fence. This section of the fence was painted with a scene of a lush park where several



women holding umbrellas watched over their children as they played by a pond. Two boards of the secret gate were painted the bright blue of the sky and the dark blue of the water, which is how it got its name.

Bob pulled a small rope handle hidden in the grass at the bottom of the fence and raised the two boards. He stepped inside, shut the gate, and headed for the salvage yard's small office.

The salvage yard seemed eerily quiet as Bob made his way through the maze of junk. He seldom came to the yard this early, and it was strange to hear it so quiet. In fact, as Bob fetched his bicycle from behind the office, the only sound he heard was the rough, coughing motor of a truck making its way up the street.

Bob pushed his bicycle up to the bars of the front gate and listened as the truck approached. Out of instinct, he stepped back behind a section of lumber as the vehicle came into view. The small pickup truck slowed as it came abreast of the yard, then came to a stop right outside the front gates.

Bob gasped when he saw the sign painted on the passenger side door. It read:

DUNBAR CONSTRUCTION, INC.

Serving Santa Barbara

for over 20 years!

The truck paused outside the large iron gates for several seconds. Bob struggled to see who was behind the wheel, but the windows were tinted too dark to see clearly.

Remembering that he had his camera with him, Bob

whipped it out of its case. He adjusted the settings to make up for a lack of flash, and then aimed it at the truck. He snapped the remaining photos on his roll and rewound the film. Then, after a tense minute, the truck ground into gear and pulled away.

Bob waited until the truck was well out of sight and then rushed over to Jupiter's workshop. He used Easy Three, the simplest entrance into headquarters. It consisted of a large oak door still on its hinges, which was fastened to a huge pile of timber. When unlocked using a big rusty key hidden in a barrel of other metal debris, the door led to a short passageway and the original side door of the mobile home trailer. The boys only used this entrance when the yard was deserted, or they were sure no one was watching.

Bob snapped on the lamp hanging over the large desk and set his bag and camera down. He then took his roll of film and stepped into the small washroom which they had converted into a darkroom. When he shut the door the tiny room became completely black.

He clicked on the red light bulb and filled several containers with various solutions. Having a father as a reporter, Bob had become quite adept at developing his own film ---- and the addition of a darkroom in headquarters had been his idea. In order to save time, Bob only developed the pictures of the Dunbar Construction truck ---- saving the rest for later.

He exposed two photos which clearly showed the truck, dipping each into a solution, then rinsing them in a pan of water. When he was finished he hung the dripping photos from clothespins attached to a wire.

When the photos had adequately dried, Bob selected the one which had the best picture quality, slipped it into an oversized envelope, and placed it carefully inside his duffel bag.

When he had cleaned up the darkroom, Bob switched off all the lights and let himself out through Tunnel Two. He rinsed his hands off under a faucet and then balanced his bag on the handlebars of his bicycle.

Deciding to take no chances of being spotted if the driver of the truck made another pass by the salvage yard, Bob pushed his bicycle to the rear of the yard and let himself out through Red Gate Rover ---- another secret entrance and exit in the salvage yard's long fence.

Bob was positive that Jupiter would want to know of this development immediately. But with all the tenants living at Mr. Eldridge's house, Bob figured it was much too early to place a phone call. He decided he would get a quick change of clothes and catch the next bus to Santa Barbara.

Pushing his bicycle out behind the small cottage that Hans and Konrad lived in, Bob hopped on and sliced through the low-hanging fog toward the nearest street corner. Being careful not to be seen, he began pedaling his bicycle furiously for home.

13

JUPITER HAS A HUNCH

AS BOB WAS BOARDING the bus in Rocky Beach that would take him to Santa Barbara, Jupiter and Pete were enjoying a hearty breakfast with John Crowe and Archie and Price Eldridge. Crowe helped himself to another plateful of scrambled eggs and smiled at Mr. Eldridge.

“I agree that there seems to be strange happenings at the Mission Temple,” the famous mystery writer said, “but these boys are resourceful, and, more importantly, responsible. I know that they wouldn’t hesitate to call in the proper authorities if they felt the case was too hot to handle. Isn’t that right, Jupiter?”

The First Investigator swallowed his mouthful of eggs and nodded seriously. He handed Mr. Eldridge one of his honorary deputy cards from Chief Reynolds. “The Rocky Beach Chief of Police has faith in us. We’ve helped him solve a number of difficult cases.”

Archie Eldridge whistled as his father passed him the card. “Gosh, you fellows are really serious about this detective stuff aren’t you?”

Price Eldridge sighed reluctantly and then gave in. “I suppose you’re right. Besides, it would save me a lot of embarrassment if I could get to the bottom of this without

having to call the . . .”

A look of complete shock appeared on the older Eldridge’s face. He stood at the stove with his mouth open, gaping at the doorway.

Standing there was Harry Watson and Trisha Colgate. Everyone in the kitchen watched in surprise as the reclusive Watson sat at the table and helped himself to toast and juice. Miss Colgate poured a cup of coffee and leaned against the far wall.

“Good morning,” Watson said jovially. “I hope you have enough for two more.”

Jupiter watched Watson with interest as Eldridge stood there blankly, not able to mask his astonishment. He started fumbling with a carton of eggs.

“Of ---- of c-c-course. There’s plenty of food for all!” Eldridge beamed with enthusiasm. The elderly gentleman seemed quite pleased that all of his tenants were together in the same room. He bustled about, pouring coffee and serving up platters of eggs and bacon.

Archie looked stunned too. He glanced at Jupe and Pete with raised eyebrows and grinned. “This is a first,” he muttered under his breath.

“I hope we’re not interrupting,” Watson said pleasantly. “Please continue your conversation.”

“We were just talking about the gargoyles walking around last night . . .” Pete began. He was cut off by a sharp kick to his ankle from Jupiter. “I ---- I mean . . .”

Harry Watson looked thunderstruck. “What’s this? Gargoyles moving about at night? You boys must have been dreaming!”

Price Eldridge's face became flushed and Pete immediately wished he hadn't said anything.

"Price has seen some strange activity on the rooftops of the Mission Temple," John Crowe explained. "And something that looked like a gargoyle gave the boys a fright last night."

Harry Watson wagged his finger at Trisha Colgate. "I bet I know just what's going on! It's the same ruffians that have been harassing Miss Colgate over at the construction site!"

Mr. Eldridge looked alarmed. "You've been troubled by hoodlums? Why didn't you say something? I'll not have my tenants living in fear!"

Trisha Colgate looked uncomfortable having all eyes on her. She nervously stirred her coffee with a spoon. "Some teen punks have been running around the neighborhood," she said finally. "You know ---- doing what kids do. Vandalizing stuff, destroying property, stealing equipment. Mr. Dunbar has even chased some of them off the roof of the bank. It sounds to me like they're horsing around at the Mission Temple as well."

Price Eldridge looked relieved. "I'll bet that's just what it is! And here I thought I was imagining things. It was all a gang of teenagers playing pranks!" His features suddenly became downcast as he looked at Jupiter and Pete. "But that could still be dangerous for you two. If there's a gang of vandals running loose in the neighborhood, they may try to harm you."

Archie wiped his mouth on his sleeve and leaned back in his chair. "Say, I've got an idea, Pop. If you're worried

about these kids getting mixed up in anything dangerous at the Mission, why don't I tag along? I know everyone there and can keep an eye open for any trouble."

Price Eldridge smiled at his son. "That's a fine idea, Archie. I would feel much better having an adult around. The boys aren't likely to be hassled if you're there."

John Crowe set his plate and silverware in the sink and patted Eldridge on the back. "It sounds like everything is under control here. Now if you'll excuse me, I've a screenplay that I've been neglecting."

"Thanks for coming over," Eldridge said sincerely.

"No problem," Crowe smiled. As the famous writer passed Jupiter on the way out the door, he darted his eyes at Trisha Colgate and whispered lowly. "Keep me posted."

Jupiter nodded his head slightly, saying nothing.

When John Crowe had left, Jupiter set his plate in the sink. "I think we'll head over to the Mission Temple now, Mr. Eldridge. There's a few points we'd like to discuss with Mr. LeSchiff."

"That's fine, boys," Eldridge smiled. "I'll have lunch on at noon."

"I'll go with you," said Archie, picking up his cape and scabbard. "I've got to go over there anyway to pick up the rest of my costume for tonight's performance."

The three left the house and began walking through the back yard.

"I don't buy Miss Colgate's story," the First Investigator said. "And neither does Mr. Crowe."

"What do you mean, Jupiter?" asked Archie.

"Yeah, First," said Pete, "it would sure explain an

awful lot!”

“That’s just what I’m saying,” Jupe said firmly. “It’s too convenient. Don’t you find it strange that Watson and Colgate never come down for breakfast - or *any* meal - and suddenly they appear the morning after we see the gargoyle for ourselves?”

“Hm . . . that *is* kind of strange now that you mention it,” Archie agreed. “I know Pop was sure surprised.”

“Up to this point no one has mentioned anything about a gang of vandals in the neighborhood,” Jupiter continued. “I think there’s more to Mr. Watson and Miss Colgate than meets the eye.”

Archie Eldridge scratched the whiskers on his chin and shook his head. “Believe me, Harry Watson is harmless. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. Trisha Colgate is a different story. She’s plain mean. Besides, she’s been mixed up in some shady business in the past. I wouldn’t be surprised if she was up to no good. But I have to disagree about the vandals, Jupiter. I’ve seen them for myself!”

“You have?” the stocky boy said in surprise. “Why didn’t you say something when we watched your father’s film yesterday?”

Archie smiled sheepishly. “I didn’t know you were serious about this detective thing. I just thought you were some dumb kids playing Sherlock Holmes. I thought I’d let you figure it out for yourselves ---- make you think you’d cracked a big case or something. Now that I know you’re for real, I wish I would have said something.”

“That happens all the time,” Pete explained. “Adults think we’re too young to know anything.”

As they continued walking, the three crossed the alley and made their way along the side of the Temple across from Carl Dunbar's construction site.

Suddenly Pete stiffened.

"Don't look now, fellows, but Mr. Dunbar is at his trailer ---- and he's got a gun!"

Jupiter glanced over at the trailer. Pete was right. Dunbar stood on the trailer's top step, a double barreled shotgun cradled in his arms. The construction man cracked open the barrel and loaded two cartridges.

Jupiter smiled and waved at the man. "Good morning," he called out.

Dunbar glared at the boys. He snapped the barrel of the gun back together with a wicked sounding *click!*

"What are you doing, First?" Pete hissed, "trying to get us killed?"

"Yeah," Archie gulped, "that guy is as friendly as a rattlesnake!"

Jupiter smiled confidently. "Don't let his act fool you. Remember ---- he gets his way by bullying and intimidating people. He's just trying to frighten us."

"Well it's working like a charm," Pete exclaimed.

Even though he appeared unfazed, Jupiter joined Archie and Pete in breathing a silent sigh of relief when they turned the corner and entered through the front door of the Mission Temple.

"Let's walk on the other side of the building from now on," Pete suggested.

Voices came to them from far off within the giant building. The faint French accent of Anton LeSchiff echoed

off the walls as he gave direction to someone.

“Come on, fellows,” Archie said. “Sounds like Mr. LeSchiff is in the auditorium.”

The trio pushed aside a thick velvet curtain and marched down the long aisle toward the stage. The immaculately dressed LeSchiff was pulling at his hair as he watched a handyman on a tall ladder work on a lighting rig.

“Careful now ---- careful. Yes, that’s it,” he was saying, “we need to make sure that it’s properly secured.” The Frenchman smiled wearily and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief as he saw the three approaching.

He called up to the handyman on the ladder. “Thank you, George. That will be all for now.”

“Trouble with the lights?” asked Archie.

LeSchiff stepped down the small flight of stairs from the stage and sank into a seat in the first row. “I found a lighting rig hanging over the stage when I came in this morning. One side had broken free. I just had this repaired last week! Someone could have been seriously injured if they were on stage when it came loose.”

“Were there any signs of tampering?” asked Jupiter.

LeSchiff shook his head. “It’s too hard to tell. The lights are old. They have many dents and scratches. I would not be able to tell if anyone purposely weakened the chains.”

The harried director opened a bottle of stomach antacids and popped several in his mouth. He chewed vigorously, then smiled at the boys. “Enough with my problems. What can I do for you, my young friends. You have made progress against my nemesis, Mr. Dunbar, yes?”

“I believe so,” Jupiter confirmed. “But I’d like to ask you some questions.”

“But off course,” LeSchiff said with a wave of his hand, “what would you like to know?”

“I was wondering if you keep an inventory of your props. I mean, do you know every item in that room? And if so, has anything come up missing?”

LeSchiff rose from his seat and began walking up the aisle. “There is an index that catalogues everything in the prop room. We need to know what we have in stock when we put on a show. If there’s something we don’t have, we must special order it from a company in Los Angeles.”

“You guys go on ahead,” Archie said, heading in the opposite direction. “I’m going to fetch my costume. I spilled coffee on it last night,” he admitted sheepishly. “I’ll catch up with you fellows later.”

LeSchiff rolled his eyes, then led the boys up the stairs to the second floor, producing a large ring of keys from his pocket. He stopped outside the prop room door. “I haven’t looked at the master list recently, but I would say that yes - everything appears to be in order.”

The Frenchman unlocked the door and opened it wide. The room appeared just as it had before. Sasha the lion stood guard in the same place, the sword with the ruby in the hilt was still by the door, and all of the antique props and set-pieces looked untouched and unmoved.

LeSchiff moved about the room for a moment, then shrugged. “It is all here, young Jones.”

Jupiter sighed in disappointment. He was sure that there was something in the building that someone wanted.

14

TRAPPED!

JUPITER TUGGED AT his bottom lip, thinking furiously. He paced about the prop room, scowling, as LeSchiff counted the items on his master list.

“What now, First?” asked Pete.

The owl-faced First Investigator suddenly smiled and looked at LeSchiff with a gleam in his eye. At the far end of the room was a door. Jupiter walked over to it and pulled firmly on the ancient knob. The brass handle came away in his grip, but the door didn’t budge.

“Where does this door lead?”

LeSchiff shrugged, looking uncertain. “Why, I believe it leads to an anteroom, which in turn leads to the old projection room at the rear of the building. Why do you ask?”

Jupiter flashed a superior smile, carefully replacing the broken knob. “Assuming that the gargoyle isn’t real ---- I mean that it’s actually a man ---- that would indicate there is something in or on this building he wants that he can’t procure by conventional methods.”

“That thing looked pretty real to me, Juve,” Pete argued. “I was two feet away from it!”

“You have seen this creature?” LeSchiff said

uneasily. "Moving about on my building?"

"Gargoyle's do not fly," Jupiter said flatly. "Nor do they move in any other way. Pete and I saw what appeared at first glance to be a gargoyle outside our window at Mr. Eldridge's house. But there must be a rational explanation. In order for my theory to work, we must presume that what we saw last night, and what Mr. Eldridge caught on film, was a man."

"Okay, okay," said Pete, "what's your theory?"

"I was thinking about Mr. Eldridge's film this morning, and it gave me an idea. Other than our run-in with the creature last night, the gargoyle has been seen in approximately the same place at the same time on each occasion. That leads me to believe that there is something in this building the creature wants. If you'll recall, Pete, when we watched that film, it seemed as if the gargoyle simply vanished into thin air on the side of the building."

"Boy do I remember," Pete shivered. "That was one of the creepiest things I've ever seen!"

"You'll also recall," Jupe continued, "that the film was of poor quality ---- the picture was grainy and poorly lit. At the point the creature vanished, it had descended into a deep shadow. What if it didn't disappear at all? What if it went in one of the windows on the second floor? With our imaginations stirred up by Mr. Eldridge's anxiety, and the poor quality of the film, it would be a logical explanation!"

The French director's face paled. "You ---- you mean th-th-that *thing* could be here in the building as we speak?"

Pete gulped and looked around nervously. "I wish you wouldn't have said that," he moaned. "At least until

I've found a good weapon to defend myself with!"

Jupiter shook his head. "It's too early in the day for him to be here now. And that means it's a perfect time to investigate what it's looking for!"

LeSchiff nodded in agreement. "But where shall we look? The building is so big ---- where do we start?"

"Judging by Mr. Eldridge's film, the gargoyles sit on the corner-posts of the third floor balcony. So the window the creature 'disappeared' into would be on the second floor," said Jupiter. The stocky boy pointed at the door with the broken knob. "Do you have keys to every door in this building, Mr. LeSchiff?"

LeSchiff pulled out his large key-ring. "I'm afraid not, Jupiter. When I first arrived I tried every key at every lock. But as you can see, some locks here are so old that the keys are long gone. Others are jammed shut with rust. I was told by the previous owner that the spare rooms on this floor are vacant."

"We'll have to find out for sure," Jupiter said. "If I'm right, what Mr. Eldridge has been seeing is not a gargoyle at all, but a thief who scales down the wall on a rope and enters into a second story window."

"But what about that thing we saw last night?" Pete protested. "That sure wasn't a thief!"

"I have an idea about that, but first I need proof. Before we can make any progress on this case, we must find a way through this door."

Pete stepped up to the door and rapped on it. "It's solid oak. And the hinges are on the other side. We'd need an axe to get through this thing!"

Jupiter looked thoughtful. "Then we'll have to gain entrance the same way the gargoyle has."

"I don't like the sound of that," Pete said helplessly.

Jupiter led the group out of the prop room. When LeSchiff had locked the door, they began marching up the stairwell to the third floor.

"Will your keys work up here?" Jupiter asked.

"There is no need," LeSchiff replied. "The third floor is no longer used. The custodian doesn't even clean it any longer."

When they had reached the third floor landing, Jupe halted everyone on the top step and dropped to his knees, his nose barely an inch from the floor.

"What is it, First?" asked Pete.

The round-faced boy studied the floor for a moment longer, then stood. He had a big grin on his face. "The dust on the landing has been disturbed recently. Peculiar, wouldn't you say, for a floor that is no longer in use?"

He proceeded up the last step and stood with his hands on his hips. The third floor landing was a hallway with a door at either side. The one on the right stood open, the other was closed. Jupiter tried the closed door. It was locked up tight. He led Pete and LeSchiff through the open door on the right.

They had passed into a long, narrow room. Grimy windows lined the far wall. The curtains had fallen down long ago, and bright sunlight illuminated the dusty chamber. In the center of the hall were two ancient, claw-footed billiard tables - each covered with dropclothes. Racks of pool cues and cracked, discolored balls lined the walls. Three

more doors awaited inspection at the far end. Two of the doors were closed.

Pete whistled. "Uncle Titus would think he'd died and gone to heaven if he could see these billiard tables!"

Jupiter chuckled. "I'd like to see how he'd manage to get them down from the third floor!"

They advanced further into the room. Suddenly, they heard the clanking of a metal pipe falling to the marble floor.

"I think it came from over here," hissed Pete. He rushed through the door that stood open, followed closely by Jupiter and LeSchiff.

They looked about the dimly lit room. Then whirled in alarm when the door slammed shut behind them!

They stood in complete darkness. Pete raced to the door and shook the handle.

It was locked!

"Hey! Let us out!" he cried.

Pete heard LeSchiff's voice close by. "Let me try my keys." The Frenchman's face suddenly appeared, lit by the glow of his cigarette lighter. He handed the lighter to Pete and began inserting keys into the lock. Jupiter and Pete watched apprehensively as the keys were discarded one by one.

Finally, LeSchiff was down to the last key. He inserted the key into the lock and turned it. The distinct sound of the lock's catch turning over was like music to their ears.

"Success!" LeSchiff cried. He grasped the knob and pushed, but the door remained stubbornly in place. He pushed again, throwing his shoulder into the door.

“Let me see the lighter,” he said urgently. Holding the flame close to the knob, the Frenchman kneeled and peered through the keyhole.

“I’m afraid we’re trapped, gentlemen,” he reported grimly. “A board has been placed under the handle, effectively locking us in. No one uses the third floor ---- who knows when someone will think to look for us up here.”

“Maybe Archie can hear us,” Pete said hopefully. He began pounding on the door and hollering. “Help! Archie! We’re locked in on the third floor!”

Jupiter and LeSchiff joined in. They shouted for several minutes until they were nearly hoarse. Finally they collapsed to the floor, exhausted. LeSchiff extinguished his lighter, and they sat in the darkness, breathing heavily.

15

BOB PROVIDES A CLUE

EACH MINUTE SEEMED an eternity as the captives waited in the smothering darkness. LeSchiff kept checking his wristwatch repeatedly, while Jupiter worked on the door's hinges with his pocketknife.

"It's no use, Second," Jupe said in disgust. "The hinges on this door are stripped. My blade is useless."

"Bob's sure to come looking for us tomorrow," Pete said stubbornly. "But we've got to keep trying in the meantime. It could be days before he looks up here! Here - let me try!"

By the flame of LeSchiff's lighter, Pete and Jupiter examined the copper hinges of the ancient door. They took turns prying at the screws and the long bolts, but gave up when one of the blades on Jupe's knife snapped in two.

"I'm afraid we're captives until a search party comes looking for us," LeSchiff mumbled through clenched teeth. "Perhaps George heard us shouting . . . But no, he is quite hard of hearing. I wonder where young Eldridge could be?"

"Yes ---- it's strange he hasn't heard us yelling," Jupiter remarked thoughtfully.

"Do you think he locked us in, First?" asked Pete.

"Everyone in Mr. Eldridge's kitchen knew we would



be in this building today,” replied Jupiter. “But Archie is the only one we know for certain was in the building besides the handyman.”

“Maybe George locked us in?” suggested Pete.

LeSchiff chuckled. “I do not think so, young man. George has been here almost as long as the building! He has no allegiance to Dunbar, I can assure you.”

The three captives continued to chat among themselves in order to pass the time. The hours dragged on. Pete continued to work on the hinges now and again, but without much enthusiasm.

It was late in the day before Pete heard something that made his ears prick up.

“Did you hear that?” the lanky Investigator hissed.

“I heard nothing,” LeSchiff replied. “What was it?”

In the blackness, Jupiter rushed to the thick door and pressed his ear to it.

“I hear it, too,” he reported. “I think someone’s calling for us! ”

Pete leapt to the door and began shouting. “Help! We’re in here! On the third floor!” He was joined by Jupiter and LeSchiff as he pounded and kicked at the door.

Within minutes, the three heard the plank that had been wedged under the doorknob fall to the floor. The door was thrown open and there stood Bob Andrews!

“Records!” Jupiter and Pete exclaimed together.

“Boy am I glad to see you guys!” Bob grinned. “I was beginning to think the gargoyle got you!”

At that moment Price and Archie Eldridge rushed through the door. “I found him!” Mr. Eldridge gasped.

Archie Eldridge looked pale and tired. “I got nervous when I couldn’t find you guys,” he said shakily. “I came upstairs to look for you, but someone pushed me into a room on the second floor and locked me in. It was a lucky thing that Pop and your friend came looking ---- we might have been trapped for days!”

“But what are you doing here, Records?” Pete demanded. “I thought you were in Hollywood until tomorrow!”

Bob grinned. “I guess I make a better investigator than a reporter. Dad knew my mind was on the case and offered to let me come back early. When I got here, Mr. Eldridge said you went to talk to Mr. LeSchiff. So I took the liberty of going to the Santa Barbara Public Library to look up information on our suspects. When I got back and saw that you still hadn’t returned, I got worried. So Mr. Eldridge and I came looking for you.”

Bob handed over a sheaf of photocopies to Jupiter. “I searched through the microfilms of Santa Barbara’s local newspaper for the last year. I couldn’t find any information on Dunbar ---- but I *did* find this!”

The photocopies were of a headline and article that read partially:

Judge Declares Mistrial

Santa Barbara District Court Judge Samantha Vanderpoole has declared a mistrial in the state’s case against Walter Nastow. Nastow was the chief suspect in the armed robbery of a Smithe & Smithe armored truck in May of last year.

A second man was seen fleeing the scene. Police suspect the man was Nastow's accomplice.

Strangely, no money was reported stolen as the armored truck was merely transporting paper from a mill in Ventura en route to the airport, where it was to be delivered to Washington, D.C. Charges of assault with a deadly weapon were dropped when it was discovered Nastow's weapon was merely a toy water pistol.

However, due to the conduct of defense attorney Trisha Colgate, who allegedly attempted to bribe jurors, the case was declared a mistrial and thrown out. Colgate was reprimanded and nearly lost her license to practice law in the state of California.

A second trial was scheduled in the case against Nastow, but the defendant fled the country and is believed to be in hiding in Mexico.

Beside the article in the newspaper was a photo of Miss Colgate and Walter Nastow leaving the courthouse amid a sea of reporters. Trisha Colgate's face held her usual sneer, but Jupiter could clearly see the gap in Nastow's front teeth as he smiled for the camera. Nastow was obviously pleased with his attorney's misconduct that let him go free!

Jupiter pinched his bottom lip between his fingers as he studied the photo, his mind humming at top speed.

"Gosh --- that Nastow fellow sure looks familiar," Pete frowned as he looked at the newspaper over Jupiter's shoulder. "It's almost like we've seen him before."

Bob nodded in agreement. “That’s just what I thought when I first saw the picture, Second! It’s on the tip of my tongue ---- but I just can’t remember!”

Jupiter’s eyes suddenly gleamed. He whirled toward Bob and Pete. “I believe, fellows, you’ve just hit upon the solution to the mystery!”

“We did?” Pete gaped. “What did we say?”

Jupiter pointed to the photo of Walter Nastow. “The reason this man looks so familiar is because we *have* met him before ---- in a way!”

Everyone looked at the First Investigator in surprise. “What do you mean, Jupiter?” cried Price Eldridge. “When did you meet this Walter Nastow? The date on this story is from a year ago!”

“That’s right,” Archie agreed, “you couldn’t possibly have met him!”

“I’ll have to explain later,” Jupe said stubbornly. “We don’t have much time. Bob, did you find out anything else at the library?”

“I nearly forgot!” the small boy cried. He handed the manila envelope that he had been holding to Jupiter. “I stopped by the salvage yard this morning to get my bicycle and took this photograph!”

Jupiter opened the envelope and slid the oversized picture out. Everyone crowded around to get a look. The black and white photograph clearly showed a Dunbar Construction truck passing by the front gates of the Jones Salvage Yard.

“Good grief!” shouted Pete. “What’s Dunbar doing in Rocky Beach?” The Second Investigator suddenly

remembered the shotgun the construction man had been loading that morning. “On second thought, I don’t think I want to know!” he moaned.

Jupiter handed the photo back to Bob and scowled. “This is an unexpected development,” he said finally. “We need to move quickly if we are to solve this case.”

“What do you have in mind, First?” asked Bob.

The slightly overweight First Investigator nodded his head toward the rear of the building. “Our first priority is to get into that back room. The key to the whole mystery may be inside. But first I’ll need to go back to Rocky Beach!”

“Rocky Beach!” Pete cried. “What in the world do you have to do there?”

Jupiter gave them a maddening look ---- one that suggested he wasn’t willing to tell more than he had to. “Let’s just say there’s a device I’ve been tinkering with in my workshop that may help us solve this case.”

He dug in his pocket and pulled out some coins. “I hope I have enough for bus fare. I wasn’t counting on an extra trip to Rocky Beach and back.”

“Here,” said Bob, handing Jupe a five dollar bill. “This should be plenty for bus fare.”

Jupiter took the money from his partner and paused, a look of amazement on his face. The First Investigator held the bill tightly in his fingers.

“What is it, Jupe?” asked Pete. “Five isn’t enough?”

Jupiter grinned. “Actually ---- it’s *perfect*!”

16

FACE OF THE CREATURE

BOB AND PETE PACED restlessly about Price Eldridge's house while they waited for Jupiter to return from his emergency trip to Rocky Beach.

Three hours had passed and it was nearly dark outside when he finally arrived. Bob was watching out the front window of the parlor when he saw the familiar shape of a Rolls Royce pull into the driveway.

"Jupe's back!" he called to Pete. "And he brought Worthington!"

The two boys raced down the porch steps and up to the sleek black car. Even with the darkening sky, the luster of the paint and gold trim seemed to glow.

Jupiter emerged triumphantly from the back seat carrying a small black satchel.

"I missed the next bus back to Santa Barbara," he explained. "So I took a chance and called Worthington on the Rolls' car-phone. Lucky for us the strike in Hollywood was settled and he had just returned. He picked me up at the bus station."

"Good evening, chaps," Worthington bowed. "Hot on the trail of another villain, I understand." The tall chauffeur smiled broadly. "After a week in Hollywood

catering to rich actors, I'm looking forward to stretching my legs and providing assistance to The Three Investigators!"

"We're always glad to have you, Worthington," said Pete. "But you might sing a different tune when you see the gargoyle!"

"I shall try to retain my composure should I run afoul of the creature, Master Crenshaw," Worthington grinned.

The four friends started up the walk, Jupiter carrying the small black satchel at his side.

"What's in the bag, Jupe?" asked Bob.

Jupiter smiled confidently. "Oh, a little project that I've been tinkering with in my workshop. If it works like I hope it will, we won't have to search for the evidence in this case. The evidence will come to us!"

Pete scowled. "Life would be so much easier if you didn't talk in riddles all the time, Jupe."

When Jupiter had locked up his device in Mr. Eldridge's bedroom, he took his satchel, and, along with Worthington and Price Eldridge, headed across the alley to the Mission Temple.

The stocky boy fished the key that had been provided by Mr. LeSchiff out of his pocket, and led the party through the Mission's service entrance. LeSchiff was awaiting them in the great auditorium.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he waved. "I see you've brought company. I'm relieved, actually. I've been jumping at shadows since this whole affair began. I fear that scoundrel Dunbar may strike at any moment!"

The Frenchman led the group up the aisle of the auditorium to the stairwell. LeSchiff clicked on the lights

and the party proceeded up to the third floor. The lights in the stairwell were the only ones working. LeSchiff flipped the lightswitch on the third floor landing, but the hall remained in darkness.

“We’ll have to go by flashlight,” he announced. “George doesn’t keep up with the maintenance on the third floor since it is no longer in use.”

Everyone switched on their flashlights, and, with Jupiter in the lead, they passed by the billiard tables to the door at the far end of the long hall.

Bob grasped the knob and pulled, but the door didn’t budge. He knelt down and examined the lock.

“A piece of metal has been jammed into the lock and broken off,” he reported. “And fairly recently by the looks of it. The metal is nice and shiny where the break is.”

Jupiter knelt beside Bob to have a look. He finally gave a grunt and fished in his bag for a pair of pliers and a screwdriver. “Someone is going to great trouble to keep us out of this room,” he remarked.

After a few minutes work, Jupiter gave a cry of success. He carefully removed the piece of metal from the keyhole and turned the knob. A wave of musty air blew in their faces as the ancient hinges screeched in protest.

“That door sounded like it hasn’t been opened in a hundred years!” Pete shivered.

“More like one hundred minutes,” Jupiter said grimly. He shined his flashlight on the floor. A path of footprints had disturbed the dust. “Our gargoyle appears to use doors like a regular person.”

“So it’s a smart monster,” Pete gulped. “That doesn’t

make me feel much better. I like my monsters to be dumb and slow. That way if I can't outsmart them, I can outrun them!"

They shined their flashlights about the dank room. Old chairs and benches covered in a thick layer of dust lined the walls. In the center of the far wall were French doors which opened up onto the third story balcony ---- and its protective gargoyles!

"Stay together," Price Eldridge instructed. "I don't want anyone getting lost or injured!"

The French doors had been boarded over and curtained off many years before. But the drapes had now been pulled aside, and the planks covering one of the doors had been removed.

"Move cautiously, Master Jones," Worthington intoned as Jupiter opened the door and stepped outside onto the Mission's huge third story balcony.

The First Investigator led the group toward the railing and turned his flashlight onto the four foot tall gargoyle resting on the far pedestal. It appeared normal ---- facing away toward Price Eldridge's home.

Jupiter then turned his flashlight onto the second gargoyle and everyone gasped.

Mr. Eldridge's flashlight dropped from his hand and clattered to the concrete floor.

The hideous, smiling face of the second gargoyle was turned. It was looking right at them!

17

DESCENT INTO DARKNESS

“YIKES!” CRIED PETE. “It moved!”

It appeared that Pete was right. From their vantage point, the searchers should have seen the backs of both gargoyles ---- but one gargoyle was turned around in the wrong direction. Its sinister, blank eyes stared at them wickedly, just as its stone mouth turned up into a horrible grin, exposing a row of pointed teeth and long fangs. It looked like a supernatural predator, sitting absolutely still, just waiting for its victims to come close enough before pouncing!

“No,” Jupiter said firmly, “it hasn’t moved. But it has been moved!” The stocky boy shined his flashlight on the gargoyle as he approached the creature.

“Someone has been busy,” he continued, kneeling down before the statue. He pointed a chubby finger to where the feet of the stone monster met the corner pedestal of the balcony railing. “Take a look at this, fellows. Quick-dry cement. Someone wanted to make sure we didn’t move this gargoyle. Whoever it was was in a hurry. In their haste they didn’t notice that they had placed the gargoyle on backwards!”

“But why, Jupiter?” demanded LeSchiff. “What

purpose would it serve to move the gargoyle about?"

"Yeah, Jupe," Bob agreed, "that thing must weigh a ton! It would take Hans and Konrad to budge that thing!"

"On the contrary," Jupiter said. He shined his light further up on the gargoyle and pointed to a groove around its legs where the stone seemed to have crumbled. "This statue is not carved out of stone. It's a special plaster mixture made to look like stone. Furthermore, I deduce that these grooves around the gargoyle's legs were made by a rope."

"You mean the thief, or whatever he was, tied the rope around the gargoyle so he could scale down to the second story window!" Pete cried. "Like in the film!"

"Precisely," Jupiter agreed. "But the criminal assumed the statue was solid, just as we did! When he felt the rope giving way and felt pieces of plaster hitting him, he realized his mistake."

Price Eldridge stepped closer to the monster. "So *that's* how this thing seemed to get down from its perch on my film. The crook was taking it off its base and setting it aside!"

"Yes, sir," confirmed Jupe. "I'm guessing there is some kind of steel rod underneath the statue used as an anchor. With your permission, Mr. LeSchiff, I'd like to chisel off this quick-dry cement and take a look."

"Of course," LeSchiff nodded, "we will have to anyway to make the creature face in the correct direction!"

Using a screwdriver and small hammer from Jupiter's bag, Worthington and Pete made quick work of the cement around the gargoyle's feet. When it had all been chipped

away, they grasped the creature together and lifted.

“Hey!” Pete cried. “It’s really light!”

They set the statue down on the balcony floor and Jupiter examined it with his flashlight. There was a hole underneath on its base side that had been worn wide by erosion. Jupiter got down on all fours and peered inside.

“Just as I suspected,” he said triumphantly. “It’s hollow! It wouldn’t be too difficult for an adult to move this by him or herself.” He jumped up and strode back to the cornerpost that served as a pedestal for the creature. “And here’s the steel rod that was intended to hold the creature in place. Once the gargoyle had been removed, the criminal simply had to tie the rope around the steel rod and scale down the side of the building!”

“But again, *why?*” LeSchiff cried in exasperation.

“That’s just what we’re going to find out,” Jupiter said as he pulled a length of rope out of his satchel.

“I have a bad feeling about that rope,” Pete moaned.

“Don’t worry, Second,” Jupiter assured him, “I’ll be going with you. Besides, we’ve scaled the cliffs around Rocky Beach dozens of times ---- and they’re a lot higher up than this!”

“Sure, but they don’t have a hungry monster waiting for you when you reach the bottom!” Pete countered.

“Our monster is right there,” Jupiter reminded him, pointing to the gargoyle which now lay on its side. “We’re dealing with a human element that wants something in the room directly below us. They couldn’t get into the room through the door, so they had to use a rope to go in through the window. We’ll have to do the same!”

“I’m going, too!” Bob said swiftly. “I’ve missed enough action on this case!”

Price Eldridge looked over the railing at the sheer drop to the ground below. The darkness hid the worry on his face, but it could do nothing for the worry in his voice. “That’s an awfully long drop, boys. Perhaps we should call the fire department. Or break down the door!”

Jupiter finished securing the rope to the steel rod and shook his head. “We don’t want to bring any undue attention to this building if we can help it. At least not until tomorrow. We want the criminal to think his secret is safe! Don’t worry, Mr. Eldridge. I’ve brought extra nylon rope to serve as emergency lines. If the rope around the steel rod should break, we’ll still have our reserve lines to catch us.”

The stocky boy tied his safety line around his waist and instructed Bob and Pete to do the same. Then he handed the end of his line to Worthington. Pete handed his line to LeSchiff, and Bob to Mr. Eldridge. When Juve was satisfied that the knots were secure, Pete disappeared over the side of the railing and began scaling down.

A cool breeze had started to blow in the night sky as Pete descended the nylon rope. The muscular Second Investigator glided down the side of the brick building with ease. When he reached the second floor window, he tapped the glass with the toe of his shoe. The window opened an inch. Pete kicked a little harder and the window swung wide. He pulled himself inside and whistled softly up to Jupiter and Bob.

Juve, having a slightly stockier build than Pete, had more trouble making the climb. He huffed and puffed, and

after several grueling minutes, emerged outside the window red-faced and sweating.

“Boy, you need to cut out all those snacks between meals, First,” Pete joked. “And remember, we still have to go back up!”

“Thanks for the reminder,” Jupe gasped.

Being the smallest of the three boys, Bob slid easily down the rope and quickly appeared at the window.

“That’s a lot more fun than sitting around with a tape recorder all day!” he grinned.

When Jupiter had regained his composure somewhat, he shined his light about and began examining the archaic projection room.

In the center of the room was a massive movie projector. Various cambers, sprockets, and motors which had turned the huge spools sat lifeless; while its bulbs, condensers, and lenses that displayed the image onto the screen remained dark. A coating of gray dust and cobwebs indicated that it had sat in the exact same position since showing its last film so many decades before.

“Movie projectors are much smaller these days,” Jupiter lectured, swiping a cobweb from his face. “This model was state of the art in the late forties. I would be very much surprised if it wasn’t in working condition!”

They stepped further into the room and began looking about. Bob was the first to notice the walls.

“Someone took the paneling down, First!” The small boy stepped closer to the nearest wall and ran his hand across the rough plaster surface.

“They did a neat job of it, too. When my dad tore

down the paneling in our basement last summer he just ripped the stuff right off. Whoever did this took their time.”

Jupiter joined his friends at the wall and pinched his bottom lip. A further examination of the room revealed the disassembled pieces of paneling stacked neatly against the far side of the projector, and a small assortment of tools.

When several minutes had passed, Worthington called down in a hushed voice. “Are you okay, Master Jones? Do you see anything?”

Pete leaned out the window and shook his head. “Someone removed the paneling from the walls. Other than that there’s not much to see.”

The tall boy came back inside and looked at the First Investigator. “What would be underneath the paneling that would be so important, Jupe?”

But Jupiter was silent, lost in thought.

Meanwhile, Bob had been quietly looking at odds and ends that had been stored in the room. When he reached a small corner that housed a stack of wood beams and miscellaneous junk, he gave a short cry.

“Jupe! There’s still paneling on this wall!”

Jupiter rushed over and shined his flashlight on the area. “Well done, Records! Let’s clear this section out and tear down that paneling!”

Ten minutes later, Pete was prying his fingers underneath the paneling and gently tugging at the nails.

“Careful,” Jupiter chirped, pacing about behind Pete like a construction foreman. “We don’t want to destroy whatever it is behind the paneling.”

After several tense minutes, Pete pried the last nail out

and the small section of paneling finally came loose. He moved it out of the way as Bob and Jupe shined their lights on the exposed surface.

They all gasped when they saw what had been revealed beneath the paneling.

It was the face of their old friend, Madeline Bainbridge! Hidden beneath the paneling was an exquisite movie poster from thirty years ago. Except for where it had been tacked to the wall, the vintage poster had been preserved in superb condition!

The title of the movie, *The Salem Story*, swept up the poster in a fiery blaze, while the beautiful face of the actress looked skyward in a dramatic pose. Bob whistled as Jupiter nodded his head in understanding.

“So this is what all the fuss is about,” Pete chuckled, “movie posters.”

“Not just *any* movie poster, Second,” Jupiter pointed out. “This is an antique. Remember what Stephen Terrill told Bob. A collector of movie memorabilia might pay thousands of dollars for a near-perfect poster! And by the looks of this room, the crook has gotten away with *dozens* of posters!”

“So what do we do now, First?” Bob wondered.

“Now,” Jupiter said smugly, “we set the trap!”

18

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

AFTER JUPITER AND BOB had carefully removed the poster and folded it gently across its creases, The Three Investigators climbed out of the Mission Temple's projection room and back onto the third floor balcony.

When Jupiter had coiled up his rope and stowed it in his satchel, they replaced the gargoyle on its perch ---- facing in the correct direction this time.

"I will send George out here to cement our friend into place," said LeSchiff, running his hand over the gargoyle's head. "Your wandering days are over, my friend."

The group descended the stairs. When they reached the bright lights of the first floor, Jupiter spread the poster out on a table for everyone to see.

"You've been sitting on a goldmine of movie memorabilia, Mr. LeSchiff," Jupe announced. "Since you own this building, legally, everything in it is yours!"

LeSchiff lovingly ran his fingers over the vintage movie poster, a look of wonder on his face. "You mean there are more of these in the projection room?"

"There were," said Bob. "But someone found out about them. All the rest were stolen ---- the thief must not have had time to get to this last one."

“I’d like to get my hands on the scoundrel!” LeSchiff said bitterly. “Alas, the crook is probably long gone by now. The posters will never be seen again!”

Worthington patted the distraught director on the back and smiled. “I wouldn’t give up just yet, sir. With The Three Investigators on the case, the solution to the mystery cannot be too far away.”

Price Eldridge folded up the poster and handed it to LeSchiff. He then turned to Jupiter. “Do you have any idea who the thief might be, Jupe?”

“I have an idea,” Jupiter grinned.

“Of course!” LeSchiff said hotly. “That villain, Carl Dunbar ---- or one of his cronies! He’s probably using the hole he smashed in my wall to come and go as he pleases!”

“But that hole is on the second floor,” Eldridge pointed out. “It could barely be reached with an extension ladder!”

LeSchiff twisted his scarf in his hands and seethed. “Dunbar owns a construction company. He’s probably got more extension ladders than he can count! I think it’s high time we marched over to his office and confronted the man! Then we’ll find my stolen posters!”

“We’ll confront the thief,” Jupiter interjected, “but not at Dunbar’s trailer.”

“Not at Dunbar’s?” LeSchiff exclaimed. “But . . .”

“Jupe, you said we wouldn’t have to search for the evidence ---- that we could make the evidence come to us,” said Bob. “Were you talking about the movie posters?”

The First Investigator nodded his head and looked at his wristwatch. “We should be right on schedule,” he

announced happily. "If everyone would care to proceed to Mr. Eldridge's house, we can unmask the thief!"

"My house?" Price Eldridge exclaimed. "Jupiter, you think one of my tenants is behind this?"

"We'll know soon enough," was all Jupe would say.

The stocky boy led the group out the front door of the Mission Temple. They waited for LeSchiff to lock up, then, clicking on their flashlights, they walked around the side of the building.

When they passed Carl Dunbar's trailer-office, Bob pointed out that the lights were still burning inside. "Dunbar is sure working late," he observed.

"Probably cleaning his shotgun," Pete added warily.

LeSchiff, still certain that Dunbar had stolen his property, had to be restrained by Worthington from going over to the trailer and beating down the door. "You must trust Master Jones' instincts," the chauffeur explained. "The solution always seems elementary once it has been properly explained."

When they reached the back door of Eldridge's home, Jupiter outlined his plan. "Mr. Eldridge, when was the last time your tenants had a fire drill?"

Price Eldridge looked puzzled. "A fire drill? Why . . . well, *never*. Each room is equipped with a fire extinguisher and a map to the front and back doors. Why do you ask, Jupiter?"

Jupe had a shrewd look on his face. "Because, with your permission, they're going to get one tonight. As the landlord, it is your duty to ensure that each tenant has a safe escape route from his or her room in case of an emergency."

“According to Santa Barbara’s city fire code, you are also required by law, as a landlord, to conduct at least one fire drill a year. And tonight’s the night!”

“Wait a minute,” Bob said suspiciously, “how do *you* know Santa Barbara’s fire code, First?”

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. “I called the Santa Barbara Fire Department from headquarters and asked.”

“I’m not sure I fully comprehend your plan of action,” Worthington said slowly. “If I may ---- what purpose would a fire drill serve, Master Jones?”

“Yeah,” said Pete, “why don’t you fill the rest of us in on the plan. I’d like to know what’s going to happen for once ---- before it happens!”

Jupiter sighed. He hated to give away his scheme before he was certain that it would work. “If you know your Sherlock Holmes at all, you’ll recall *A Scandal In Bohemia*. The answer lies within the pages of that story. Just be ready to rush out of the house and meet on the front lawn when you hear the signal.”

“Ah ---- a very good strategy, sir,” Worthington smiled appreciatively.

“I guess I need to brush up on my Arthur Conan Doyle,” Pete complained. “Maybe you can explain it to me later, Worthington.”

“I’d be delighted, Master Crenshaw,” Worthington said with enthusiasm. “Jupiter and I happen to belong to the same Sherlockian society. We’re always eager to discuss the exploits of Holmes and the good doctor!”

Worthington turned to Jupiter. “I’ll be waiting in the Rolls should my services be required.”

“Thank you, Worthington,” said Jupe. “You should be able to return to Rocky Beach if my plan works.”

Following Jupiter’s lead, everyone entered the house and took their time retiring to their rooms. Jupiter insisted that everyone act normally. Each person was to follow their nightly routine of brushing their teeth and getting ready for bed ---- particularly Mr. Eldridge.

Jupe explained that it would arouse suspicion if the retired pilot didn’t lock up the house and make his nightly rounds just like any other night.

Before he went to bed, Jupiter explained his plan to Mr. Eldridge, then crept into the parlor and placed a quick phone call. When he hung up the phone, he jogged upstairs and pulled off his shoes.

When everyone was in bed, they all waited nervously for the signal. A half an hour passed. The house was very still, the only sound was the occasional creaking of the ancient timbers. Jupiter took advantage of the time to fully lay the plan out for Bob and Pete.

When he felt the time was right, the stocky boy readied his device and placed it near the door. It was a small cylindrical mechanism about the size of a soda can, except it was attached to a wide, flat base. Jupe put his finger on a long tab that acted as the unit’s trigger.

“Be ready to run,” he whispered.

He carefully opened the door. In the darkness, Bob and Pete climbed out of bed and joined him.

With a jerk of his thumb, the device began billowing a thick cloud of smoke into the air.

“Fire! Fire!” he screamed.



Bob and Pete immediately joined in the cry.

“Fire!” they hollered at the top of their lungs.

The three boys began pounding on the bedroom doors. Price Eldridge immediately appeared at his door and began shouting, too. “Fire!” he called frantically.

After a moment, the alarmed faces of the tenants appeared at their doors, each had their arms full of personal items. The boys and Mr. Eldridge helped them negotiate the thick smoke, and carefully guided them down the stairs and out the front door.

When everyone was out, Jupiter retrieved his device and opened up some windows in the house. He turned on some fans that he had set up earlier, and began clearing the haze of smoke from the air.

He took a moment to look in each tenant’s room and grinned. The plan had worked! Still smiling, the stocky boy trotted downstairs.

Anton LeSchiff was watching the scene unfold under the glow of a street light. He waved down a Santa Barbara Police squad car and directed it into the driveway. The car’s lights were flashing red and blue when Jupiter emerged through the front door and joined the crowd milling about on the front lawn.

Trisha Colgate, her arms full of legal documents and files, shouted hysterically at Price Eldridge. Harry Watson watched the circus from under a tree, his large delivery bag over his shoulder and his arms full of boxes.

Archie Eldridge stood beside Watson, looking somewhat comical in appearance. In his haste to get out of the house, he had only grabbed his costume from the play.

Realizing he didn't have his bathrobe on, the younger Eldridge put his long black cape on over his pajamas and his wide-brimmed hat on his head. He stood toying with his prop scabbard as he chatted with the delivery man.

With the boys preoccupied with the tenants and distracted by the squad car, no one noticed that eight people came out of the house instead of seven. A shadowy figure slinked around the side of the house in the confusion and headed in the direction of the Mission Temple.

He didn't get far. Showing impressive athletic agility not suggested by his lanky frame, Worthington soared through the air and brought Carl Dunbar to the ground for the second time in two nights!

19

JUPITER MAKES AN ACCUSATION

Everyone stared in shock as the gruff construction man was marched, red faced, around the corner. Even Jupiter, who was seldom surprised, had a look of astonishment on his face as Worthington held Dunbar securely by his shirt collar, one arm wrenched firmly behind his back.

“Wow!” Pete said with admiration, “that was a swell tackle. Nice work, Worthington!”

“Thank you, Master Crenshaw,” the chauffeur beamed. “I decided to take action when I saw this gentleman attempting to flee the premises.”

“Dunbar!” Price Eldridge gasped. “He really was behind it all!”

Dunbar cursed and struggled to free himself, but Worthington’s grip was like a vice. “Get your hands off me, you English nitwit!” he raged. “I’ll see every last one of you in court!”

Outraged, LeSchiff immediately confronted the construction man. “Thief!” he cried, prodding a finger into Dunbar’s chest. “Burglar! Vandal! It is *you* we will be seeing in court! You’ve stolen my property, but you won’t get away with it!”

Dunbar’s face went pale. “Thief? I don’t know what

in tarnation you're talking about!" Still struggling to be free of Worthington's grip, Dunbar eyed the approaching police officer and licked his lips. "Listen, I didn't steal a thing. Heck, you can search my pockets if you think I'm lying!"

"You can release him, Worthington," Jupiter said calmly, "he's not our thief."

"Not . . . Not our thief?" LeSchiff stammered. "You must be mistaken, young Jones. We have caught him red handed!"

The police officer confronted Jupiter. "Are you the kid that called in?"

"Yes, sir," Jupiter confirmed.

The officer looked at the strange assortment of people gathered on the lawn and scratched his head. The crowd had grown considerably larger as neighbors from up and down the block came out to see what was going on.

The officer looked at Jupe. "Would you mind telling me what this is all about? I know what you told me on the phone, but . . ."

"Certainly, officer," Jupe said somewhat pompously. He turned to look at Price Eldridge. "Sir, you hired us to investigate a restless gargoyle. The solution to that mystery is standing right over there."

Jupiter pointed at Archie Eldridge. The young man's jaw dropped as he took a few steps forward. He twisted the scabbard in his hands nervously, the red ruby gleaming in the moonlight. "W-w-what?" he blurted out. "What do you mean, Jupiter? How could I be the gargoyle? I was locked in a room at the Mission just like the rest of you!"

"Archie?" Price Eldridge gasped. "Are you sure,

Jupiter? I'm sorry to doubt you, but . . . well, he's my son. What proof do you have that he's mixed up in this?"

"He doesn't have any proof, dad!" Archie growled, shaking his black scabbard at Jupiter. "He's only guessing! He's got everyone here and doesn't want to look like a fool!"

Everyone looked at Jupiter.

The First Investigator pinched his bottom lip between his fingers. "It's true you were locked in at the Mission. But you locked yourself in that room. When you realized we meant to investigate the projection room, you knew you had to act quickly. You managed to lead us into a room where you locked us in using a board under the knob. Then you had an idea. You knew your father had some quick-dry cement stored at his house. You raced over there and got it, then returned to the Mission. Acting quickly, you removed the gargoyle from its perch, lowered yourself down a rope, and entered the projection room. You then proceeded to tear down the remaining pieces of paneling and remove the last of the old posters. Except one! You didn't notice the paneling in the small corner, because it was covered with junk. We found that poster later when we examined the room for ourselves. Confident you had all the posters, you climbed back up the rope."

Jupiter paused dramatically and stared at Archie. "Thinking you had found a way to keep us out of that room, you mixed up a bucket of cement and affixed the gargoyle to its perch. That way we couldn't get to the steel rod hidden underneath. However, you were in such a hurry that you failed to notice you had put the statue on backward! You

hid the bucket and were about to leave when you ran into a bit of bad luck. As you were exiting the building, you heard Bob and your father coming up the stairs. Thinking quickly, you stepped inside the nearest room and began pounding on the door. When they let you out you concocted a story about being locked in that room.”

“Gosh, that’s right,” cried Bob. “Now that I think about it, we didn’t need a key to let Archie out of that room. Because the door wasn’t locked!”

Jupiter nodded in agreement. Price Eldridge rubbed his chin, and looked doubtful. “It makes sense, Jupiter. But there’s still no proof. Short of a confession, I guess I have to believe Archie!”

Once more, all eyes turned to Jupiter. The stocky boy pointed at the prop scabbard in Archie’s hands. “Have you noticed that there’s never been a sword inside that scabbard?”

Archie smiled guiltily and looked down at the prop. “I ---- I lost it a few weeks back. I didn’t want to tell Mr. LeSchiff. I thought he might fire me if he found out.”

Jupiter shook his head. “Unless I’m mistaken, the sword for that scabbard is sitting right inside the door to the prop room ---- it has a matching red ruby in the hilt. Pete and I saw it for ourselves. No ---- the reason you carry that scabbard around everywhere you go is because it is holding something - just not a sword.”

Archie Eldridge swallowed several times and smiled foolishly. He instinctively placed the scabbard inside his cape and took a few steps backward. “I ---- I don’t know what you’re talking about. The kid is crazy!”

While Jupiter was talking, Worthington had left his position beside Carl Dunbar and had quietly circled around behind Archie. The young actor bumped into the chauffeur as he stepped back, and Worthington placed a firm hand on his shoulder.

“The scabbard, my good fellow,” Worthington said crisply.

Sheepishly, Archie handed the prop over to Jupiter. With a look of triumph, Jupe poked his finger inside and carefully withdrew a thick roll of old movie posters. He handed the posters over to LeSchiff, who promptly unrolled them on the hood of the squad car.

“Marvelous!” the French director cried. “Some of these date back forty years ago! Why, here’s one for *The Man of a Thousand Faces*, and another for *The New Americans*! And this one is for *The Spectre Bride*! And they’re all like new!”

“Preserved in pristine condition,” Jupiter added. “Hidden away from sunlight and dust beneath the paneling in the Mission’s projection room.”

The police officer stepped close to Jupe and jerked a thumb at Archie. “So this is our man?”

Jupiter shook his head. “No, sir. Archie is the one responsible for the gargoyle prowling about. But the real criminal here is standing right beside him!”

20

THE PROOF IN THE PAPER

EVERYONE TURNED to look at Harry Watson.

“M-m-me?” he said timidly, shifting the stack of boxes in his arms. “I’m just a delivery man. I’m not involved in any of this!”

“He’s lying!” Archie said hotly. “It was all his idea!”

Bob and Pete looked at each other, confused.

“Mr. Watson?” Bob said skeptically. “Are you sure, First? What about Miss Colgate and Mr. Dunbar?”

Jupiter approached the delivery man. “May I see one of those packages, Mr. Watson? Or should I say Nastow?”

“Nastow?” Pete blinked. “But that’s the name of the hold-up man in Bob’s newspaper article!”

“Precisely,” Jupiter confirmed. “Walter Nastow was the man who robbed the Smithe & Smithe armored truck. And his brother ---- Harry Nastow ---- was his accomplice! Clearly they are brothers. They have the same genetic defect with their front teeth ---- a large gap. Also, when you rearrange the letters in ‘Watson,’ they spell ‘Nastow.’ A simple anagram that I noticed immediately.”

Harry Watson stared blankly at Jupiter. The delivery man’s face became flushed, and he gripped his armful of shoe-box sized packages to his chest.

“What a story!” Watson laughed. “Do I look like a criminal? The very idea is absurd!”

The timid man began backing away from the group. As he did, several of the boxes tumbled to the ground. He stooped to pick them up, thought better of it, and continued to back away.

“Stop right there,” the police officer commanded.

“I knew there was something peculiar about those boxes from the moment I picked one up on the front porch our first day here,” Jupiter continued. “I couldn’t deduce why Mr. Watson would be receiving empty boxes in the mail, until Bob handed me five dollars for bus fare.”

“I remember you seem surprised when I handed you the money,” Bob cried. “How did my five dollars provide a clue, First?”

“Because it made me realize what was so peculiar about Mr. Watson’s boxes ---- other than the fact that they were empty. It wasn’t the *weight* of the boxes that was strange, it was the *feel* of the boxes!”

“The feel?” Price Eldridge blinked. “How do you know what was inside them if you never opened one up?”

“It isn’t the boxes I’m interested in,” Jupiter explained. He bent over and picked up one of Harry Watson’s parcels and ran his hand over the wrapping paper. “It’s the paper! You’ll recall from the newspaper article Bob showed us, that the two hold-up men robbed an armored truck that contained nothing more than paper.”

“Sure,” said Pete, “they thought it was full of money, and when they realized their mistake, they ran for it.”

“If they were normal robbers they might have done

just that,” Jupiter said. “But in this case, paper was what they were after the whole time! When I called the police this evening, I learned they never disclosed the fact that one of the robbers got away with a small roll of paper. You see, each roll is embedded with microscopic fibers that bear serial numbers. If counterfeit money started showing up in the area, the police might be able to track it to its source.”

LeSchiff took the box from Jupiter and ran his fingers over the wrapping paper. “It feels like money!” he cried. The French director pulled the twine off the box and carefully opened the package. Inside, there were three more small sheets of paper.

Jupiter continued his narrative. “When his brother was caught, Harry Nastow hid the stolen roll of paper. Then, when the case against Walter Nastow was thrown out because of Miss Colgate’s misconduct, Walter took the roll and fled to Mexico ---- expecting his brother to eventually join him. However, something unexpected happened that changed the plan. Perhaps Walter became ill, or got into trouble with the law. Either way, all of their money was gone and the roll of paper was in Mexico, and the counterfeiting equipment was in California.”

Pete’s eyes lit up and he snapped his fingers. “That’s what all that weird photographic equipment was for in Mr. Watson’s ---- er, I mean, Mr. Nastow’s room!”

“Exactly, Second,” Jupiter agreed. “I’m guessing that because of his illness or legal troubles, Walter couldn’t work much, and therefore could only save a little money. He sent as much paper as he could, knowing that his brother would eventually print up enough fake money to move the

equipment from Santa Barbara to Mexico. Then they'd be able to make enough funny money for both of them to live long and prosperous lives."

"But what about Miss Colgate and Mr. Dunbar?" asked Pete. "She said we'd be pushing up the daisies, and *he* keeps showing up at Mr. Eldridge's house!"

"Yes!" LeSchiff seethed, glaring at Dunbar. "That villain must be involved in the plot somehow!"

"I don't think so," said Jupe, shaking his head. He turned to look at Trisha Colgate. "In fact, I think their involvement in this affair is nothing more than a clandestine romance."

The temperamental attorney nodded in agreement, her face flushed with embarrassment. "I'm representing Mr. Dunbar in his property-line case against Mr. LeSchiff. I couldn't risk the judge throwing out another case just because Carl and I had fallen in love. We decided to keep our relationship a secret. We were just about to leave for a midnight show at the movie theater when you boys set off your smoke bomb."

"But what about the Dunbar truck that I saw at the salvage yard?" asked Bob. "What was he doing in Rocky Beach?"

Jupiter chuckled and turned to Carl Dunbar. "Did you get your birdbaths, Mr. Dunbar?"

The construction man looked startled. "Why ---- why, yes! But how did . . .?"

"My uncle owns the Jones Salvage Yard," Jupe smiled broadly. "When I went back to Rocky Beach earlier this evening, he happened to mention his sale of three bird

baths to a construction firm in Santa Barbara.” Jupiter turned to Bob and Pete. “Apparently, Miss Colgate saw the salvage yard’s small truck that first day we were here. She came over and chatted with Konrad while we were inside meeting with Mr. Eldridge. Miss Colgate told Konrad that Dunbar was looking for three unusual birdbaths for his bank’s landscaping, and Konrad told her the salvage yard had just the thing! Naturally, not knowing Miss Colgate would eventually be a suspect, Konrad didn’t mention it to us on our return trip to Rocky Beach.”

“What I can’t figure is how Mr. Watson knew there were posters underneath the paneling in the Mission’s projection room,” said Pete. “I mean ---- it was his idea to steal the posters, right?”

Everyone turned to look at the delivery man. Watson’s face was a mask of rage. He threw down his boxes and clutched at the delivery bag that was still strapped across his shoulder. “I won’t say a word without my lawyer present!” he raged. He bared his teeth in a grimace, exposing the large gap in his front teeth.

“However he found out about the posters, he enlisted the aid of Archie to help him steal them,” Jupiter said. “Knowing he could still get some use out of his counterfeiting equipment, even without the stolen roll of paper. I’m guessing he planned on making fakes of the posters before he sold the *real* posters to dealers. That’s why he had so many antique and collector’s magazines in his room ---- so he would know the going price for rare movie posters on today’s market!”

“Of course,” Jupiter added, looking to the police

officer, “we can’t search Mr. Watson’s possessions without a warrant. But I’m quite certain that a simple background check of Harry Nastow ---- a.k.a. Harry Watson ---- will provide sufficient evidence for a warrant.”

While Jupiter was speaking, everyone had taken their eyes off of Watson. The small delivery man suddenly seized Jupiter and whipped a gun out of his bag.

“Everyone back off!” he growled, waving the firearm in front of him. “Anyone moves and I plug the kid! I’m getting out of here, and the kid is my insurance that no one follows me!”

“Master Jones!” Worthington cried, taking a step forward. “Unhand him, you villain!”

“Do as he says,” the police officer warned, holding his hands in the air. “But leave the kid, Mr. Nastow. You’re already in enough trouble. Why add kidnapping to the list? It’ll go better for you if you drop the gun and surrender.”

Harry Nastow held Jupiter in front of him like a shield, his arm tight around Juve’s neck. He waved the small gun wildly as the two began backing away toward Nastow’s car.

“I mean it,” the delivery man sneered, “if you want the kid to live, you won’t call the cops! You thought you were so smart figuring everything out. Well, you didn’t figure this out, did you! Hand me the posters, Archie. Then load those boxes into my car. If you try to follow me, the kid gets it!”

“Do as he says, Archie,” Price Eldridge gasped. “He has a loaded weapon ---- we don’t know what he’ll do!”

“No,” Jupiter said suddenly. “You don’t have to get the boxes, Archie. We’re not going anywhere!”



“First!” Bob and Pete cried. “What are you saying!”

“The man has lost his senses, Master Jones,” Worthington said fearfully, “don’t provoke him further!”

Jupiter suddenly whirled around, breaking free from Nastow’s grip. With one swift movement, the stocky boy had a foot behind Nastow’s legs and was tripping him up, forcing the small delivery man to the ground. The normally timid man was fighting like a tiger as Jupe sat on top of him!

The police officer ran over and quickly snapped handcuffs on the still struggling thief.

“That was a risky move, son,” he said grimly. “You could have been shot!”

I don’t think so, officer,” Jupiter smiled smugly. He bent down and plucked the small gun out of the grass. “The gun wasn’t loaded.”

Pete gaped. “How could you have know that, First?”

“Yeah!” echoed Bob. “You didn’t even know he had a gun until he pulled it out of his bag!”

“Easy!” Jupiter smiled. “I remembered the newspaper article and only had to look at the gun when it was right in front of my face!” The stocky boy pulled the plug out of the back and handed it over to his partners.

“It’s a water pistol!”

21

JOHN CROWE PAYS A VISIT

AFTER THE THREE Investigators left Santa Barbara, a week passed in which Bob typed up the notes for the case, and Pete helped Jupiter finish the salvage yard's inventory.

They had been planning on a return trip to Santa Barbara that weekend to discuss their latest adventure with John Crowe, when the famous mystery writer paid them an unexpected visit.

"Jupiter Jones! Bob Andrews! Pete Crenshaw!" Aunt Mathilda's voice rang out over the mounds of junk. "You have a visitor!" The hearty woman looked at them with mock admonishment as they trotted up to the office from Jupe's workshop.

"Saints and sinners!" she crowed. "Someday I'll find out where you three hide in all that junk! There's a Mr. Crowe here to see you."

"Hello, Mr. Crowe," said Jupiter. "We were just planning on paying you a visit!"

John Crowe grinned and cast a glance at Aunt Mathilda, who had stepped into the yard's small office to tidy up a stack of paperwork. He muttered under his breath.

"I figured it was high time I saw this hidden headquarters for myself. Besides, I had to meet with the

architect for my new house.”

“New house?” Bob and Jupe cried out.

“You’re moving to Rocky Beach?” Pete blinked.

“Indeed,” the author beamed. “The plans have been drawn up, and construction begins in two weeks. With two of my novels being made into movies, and the screenplay I’m currently working on, I decided it was time I relocated a little closer to Hollywood.”

“Gosh, that’s swell,” said Bob. “We’d be happy to help you move your stuff from your old house.”

“That won’t be necessary. I’ve got movers to do all the hard work. I just have to show up and direct traffic - tell them what goes where. But enough about my house. Let’s talk about your latest case!”

With Jupiter in the lead, the four wound through the maze of junk until they arrived at Jupe’s workshop. The stocky boy bypassed the smaller entrance of Tunnel Two, which was designed with boys in mind, for the larger entrance of Easy Three. He admitted them into the trailer, then clicked on the light above the fire-scarred desk.

“Amazing!” Mr. Crowe said with awe. “A close inspection from the outside would never reveal there’s a trailer hidden here!”

“That’s the idea!” Pete grinned.

After the boys gave the novelist a brief tour, John Crowe seated himself behind the desk and flipped open the folder which contained Bob’s notes on the case. He read them earnestly and did not say a word until he snapped the folder closed.

“Thunderation!” he cried. “You set out to uncover a

restless gargoyle, and you end up capturing a nefarious counterfeiter! But I'm wondering - what became of Carl Dunbar's court case against LeSchiff? And was the construction man really involved in a plot to have the Mission Temple condemned?"

"Dunbar figured his relationship with Miss Colgate was more important than twenty extra parking spots," explained Bob. "He dropped his lawsuit and even repaired the large hole in the wall for free!"

"It turned out that all the things going wrong at the Temple really *were* just accidents," added Pete. "The place was in worse shape than Mr. LeSchiff cared to admit. Fortunately, he was able to sell several of his old posters to collectors and use the money to make repairs on the place."

"But what of Miss Colgate corroborating Nastow's claim that a gang of vandal's were running loose in the neighborhood?" Mr. Crowe asked.

"Jupe thinks she recognized Harry Watson and figured out he was really Walter Nastow's brother," Bob answered. "She's not talking, but Harry Nastow claims she was blackmailing him ---- which would be another reason he had no money. Even though she's an attorney, we know she's capable of crooked behavior. The movie poster hanging in Carl Dunbar's trailer-office is one of Nastow's forgeries. She gave it to Dunbar as a gift. It doesn't prove anything, but it seems awfully suspicious."

John Crowe leaned back in his chair and rubbed his chin. "Hmmm . . . So that leaves us with Harry Nastow and his accomplice, Archie Eldridge. How did Nastow know there were movie posters underneath the paneling in the

Mission's projection room?"

"Nastow confessed everything after he was caught," said Jupiter. "It just so happened that his father worked as the projectionist for the Mission Temple back when it was a movie theater several decades ago. While visiting his father at a nursing home last year, Harry's father said he wished he would have kept all those old posters underneath the paneling before the theater was closed down. This gave Nastow an idea of how to make some quick money so he could move all his counterfeiting equipment to Mexico."

"Harry's brother did become ill in Mexico," Pete pointed out. "That's why Walter could only afford to send a little paper at a time. Harry figured that forging the posters would be an easy way to make some fast cash."

Now Jupiter picked up the tale again. "So Nastow broke into the Mission one night and prowled about, looking for the projection room. When he realized he couldn't get to it short of breaking down the door, he enlisted the aid of Archie Eldridge. Always strapped for cash, Archie was more than willing to help out. Whenever there was a rehearsal or show at night, Archie would slip away to the third floor, remove the gargoyle, and climb down to the projection room. Since he had worked as an acrobat in a traveling carnival several years before, the process of getting up and down the rope wasn't difficult."

"Removing the paneling *was* hard work," Bob chimed in, "he had to be careful or he'd tear the posters. He was only able to get a couple at a time ---- that's why he had to keep going back, and why his father always thought he saw the gargoyle moving about at approximately the same

time at night.”

“I assume that’s how Archie could afford to buy his father a brand new television,” Mr. Crowe guessed.

“Yes sir,” Pete agreed. “Archie isn’t a career criminal, and has never been in trouble with the law before this. Mr. LeSchiff fired him from the theater, but decided not to press charges against him.”

“A lucky break for our ill-fated thespian,” Mr. Crowe observed. “But tell me, to whom was Archie whispering the night you saw the gargoyle outside your window. And speaking of the gargoyle ---- I assume you have a satisfactory explanation as to just what it was you saw?”

“Yes sir,” Jupiter grinned. “At first Archie thought we were just a bunch of dumb kids playing at detective - he told us so himself. Earlier that day, a shipment of new costumes had come in to the Mission Temple from Los Angeles. Archie saw that one of them looked strikingly like the gargoyles that were perched on the third floor balcony. Being a natural prankster, he slipped the costume out of the building, intent on giving us a scare.”

“He knew Mr. Watson, I mean Nastow, never let anyone into his room,” continued Pete, “fearing they’d realize his photographic equipment was really counterfeiting equipment. So Archie threw a cape over his costume and knocked on Nastow’s door. He told Nastow there were new posters upstairs in his bedroom. They were discussing the posters when Jupe went out for a snack. Leaving Nastow in his bedroom, Archie excused himself for a moment, waited for Jupe to return to his father’s room, then snuck out through Nastow’s bedroom window. He gave us a good fright, then

ran back inside and up to his room.”

“He narrowly missed Miss Colgate in the hallway,” said Bob. “She was just returning from Mr. Dunbar’s trailer - which is why she had grass on her shoes.”

“Wonderful!” cried Mr. Crowe. “What could be more suspenseful than a cast of shady characters sneaking about an old house at night? It’s a dastardly plot right out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie or a Sherlock Holmes story! Which reminds me . . .”

“You’re wondering about the smoke bomb!” Jupe exclaimed.

“A clever device used in an ingenious scheme,” Mr. Crowe laughed. “You guessed correctly that by creating the illusion of fire, the thieves would bring the evidence right into your hands!”

Jupiter nodded his head. “It’s really a simple invention, and quite harmless. When the trigger is pulled, a brief burst of non-toxic smoke is emitted. I theorized, just as Holmes did in *A Scandal In Bohemia*, that a person would grab the items most important to them if they thought their house was on fire. At one point I suspected all three of Price Eldridge’s tenants. By smoking them out, I was able to see what each of them held most dear. For Trisha Colgate, it was her briefcase and legal documents. For Harry Nastow, it was his counterfeiting paper. And for Archie Eldridge, it was the empty scabbard that he always carried with him.”

“Ah, but not empty after all,” John Crowe pointed out. “Tell me, did you know there were posters inside that scabbard ---- or was that a guess just as young Eldridge claimed?”

Jupiter blushed and squirmed in his chair. “I suspected he might have the stolen movie posters hidden somewhere in his clothing. It wasn’t until I saw the gleam of the fake ruby on his scabbard that I realized Pete and I saw the same ruby on the sword in LeSchiff’s prop room. It occurred to me that Archie never went anywhere without the scabbard, and it was the perfect place to hide a roll of paper. I suppose you could say it was a guess ---- but an *educated* guess!”

John Crowe roared with laughter. “You are much too clever for your own good, young Jones! And that can only spell trouble for the next villain that is unfortunate enough to cross paths with The Three Investigators!”