

Depths

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The following account is the result of a casual debriefing of Deuxième Bureau special agent A.L. by Operative P in late 1904 just prior to agent A.L. joining the Bureau.

While in the company of a rather charming young lady I had a celebratory drink for once again biting my thumb at the “Great Detective.” At first I attributed the warm sensation I felt to her exotic beauty, yet a movement in her eyes or a quirk of her mouth, made me suspicious of her. My rather formidable sense of self-preservation was awakened, I rose to flee but darkness claimed me.

Waking up in a small room with a bed and no windows, I wracked my brain for some clue as to my current situation. Certainly the Sûreté had not apprehended me; they would not treat me in such a fashion. Possibly it was a case of mistaken identity. I have employed many disguises in the course of my profession and while many are completely fabricated personas, I sometimes assume the semblance, mannerisms and identity of a real person for my own purposes. The enemy of someone whose identity I borrowed could have mistaken me for them and captured me for some malevolent end. Then again, my captor could very well know my true identity and feel enmity towards me for some real or imagined slight. However considering that I was relatively unharmed, I thought it most probable that my host meant me no immediate harm. Unless he was a megalomaniacal madman who subjected his enemies to elaborate tortures, as had the notorious Dr. Caresco who had terrorized Paris five years past. Otherwise I deduced that my captor knew who I was and had need of my services. However the service for which I was to be employed was either of such a hazardous or impossible nature that if given a choice I would have declined it. So to ensure my service I had been kidnapped and was being taken to the destination where the “job” would be carried out.

I was needed alive, at least until the service had been rendered. Therefore, it would follow that I would be fed at least a modicum to keep me alive. Until I was fed I would have no opportunity to escape. At meal time I planned to overpower the person who brought me food or if such an opportunity did not arise available, I would use my vast powers of charm and persuasion to talk the guard into freeing me. This at least was my fondest hope.

A few hours passed, I amused myself by mentally reviewing some of my more notorious amusements such as the burglary of Crédit Lyonnais or the theft of the desk of Mr. Gerbois. Finally I heard what sounded like a key turning a lock.

I saw a large figure carrying a large bowl. Saliva flooded my mouth as I smelt an exotic stew of fish and unknown spices. The scent of ocean breeze also wafted inside the room; I was on a ship.

The man who approached was in his early to mid-fifties. He was a little over six feet in height and thickly muscled. He was dressed in a gray cotton sweater, canvas dungarees and leather boots.

“According to calculations of the monster who’s running this ship, you should be awake. Are you?” the man asked in French with a pronounced Canadian accent.

When I did not answer at once, he smiled wryly. “Of course, you won’t believe me, but I am the one person in this bedamned boat you can trust.” He squatted down beside the bowl of food and filled a spoon with a savory mixture and poured it into his mouth without letting the spoon touch his lips. “That’s to show you that the food is not poisoned, if you were concerned.” Filling the spoon again, handed it to me and said, “I know this Chineese slop isn’t very filling or very tasty but it’s all we get to eat. I have had worse believe you me. You don’t have to talk to me if you want but you do have to eat. If you don’t eat , they’ll shove a tube down your throat and fill your gullet.”

While I ate the man introduced himself as Ned Land. The name was familiar but I could not place it immediately. He told me I had been chosen to help him find a sunken treasure and that I would open a pirate’s chest.

After eating my fill I pretended to choke on the last spoonful. Using this distraction I gave Land a kick in the shins and ran out the door only to be confronted by two burly, rifle wielding Asians. At gun point I was taken to meet my host. As I would learn I had been literally shanghaied by a hunchbacked Oriental menace.

We were on a ship outfitted with sails and steam, an iron clad schooner, named I would later learn, the *Big Eyed Girl* mastered by Captain Obediah Marsh, late of Innsmouth, Massachusetts. Placed on the center of the iron sheathed deck was an elaborately decorated and canopied divan made of porcelain and teak, draped with silk. Upon this sat a Chinese gentleman of perhaps fifty or sixty years of age, clad in a saffron yellow robe and a red mandarin hat. Two large and well-muscled Asians book-ended him. Scowling menacingly, they trained rifles on me.

The elderly Asian’s long nailed hands flexed slightly from their position on his knees as his implacable gaze drew all of my attention. As my eyes began to focus and my vision became crystal clear I became arrested by his lambent green eyes. As Holmes had before him, this man saw into the depths of my being and I knew that he would be able to penetrate any guise I might choose to don or create.

Having remembered where I had heard the name Ned Land I assumed that the treasure I was to retrieve was on a particular sunken submersible.

Gambling, I asked him point blank “Exactly what am I supposed to remove from the *Nautilus*?”

His eyes widened imperceptively and his lips quirked ever so slightly. “Very good, Monsieur, you were able to deduce the circumstances of your service from some very slight clues.”

“How do you know that Mr. Land did not tell me all about your plans?”

“Do you truly believe that your conversation went unmonitored?”

I had suspected that our conversation had been monitored. However I looked surprised at the notion.

“Perhaps you are not so perceptive after all.” He paused and transfixed me with his full gaze. “Or perhaps your surprise is also a ploy? No matter. Your task is to accompany Mr. Land on a dive to the sunken *Nautilus*, to locate Captain Nemo’s safe, open said safe and bring the contents to me. Also any trinkets or treasure you might find in the interior of the ship shall also be appreciated. For this service you will be paid handsomely and returned safely to France. Attempt to escape and you will be hunted down and tortured until you acquiesce to your designated task. Once we reach our destination Mr. Land will provide you with clothing and teach you how to dive. Are there any questions?”

“A few Monsieur, a few. If I remember correctly the *Nautilus* sank off of Faroe Island in the North Seas, what are we doing in the tropics?”

“The submersible survived and Captain Nemo spent the next few years in safe harbor here at Lincoln Isle.”

I nearly laughed aloud at that. This Asian dunderhead had been taken in my Verne’s fictional sequel to *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*.

Demonstrating how perceptive he truly was, the Asian “dunderhead’s” eyes flashed bright green for a second. “Although it contained deliberately misleading information and omitted other important information, *The Mysterious Island* was a fairly accurate account of the castaways on this island. Verne deliberately confused matters by creating an inconsistent internal chronology, stating that it had been thirty years from the events of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and yet also making it appear as though the events of *The Mysterious Island* occurred concurrently with those of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*. He also made it appear as though the castaways had read *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and were familiar with the story of Captain Nemo. In truth, neither Gideon Spillett nor Cyrus Harding had ever heard of Captain Nemo prior to meeting him aboard the *Nautilus* in 1869. Jules Verne inserted that bit for purposes of obfuscation and also to cross promote his other book. The destruction of the island was also a deliberate mistruth.”

“Why would Verne lie?” I blurted out half in curiosity and half out of the need to defend a fellow Gallic against the accusations of this Asian.

“Nemo did not die in 1869. I encountered him in London in 1898. Verne was protecting one of his main sources of information. The events of *20,000 Leagues* occurred concurrently with those of *The Mysterious Island*. In 1865, the American soldiers did land on the island he was using as a secret base. He did aid them. The following year began the events of *20,000 Leagues*. There were periods of time when Nemo returned to Lincoln Island which were not depicted in *20,000 Leagues*, times when Arronax and company were not allowed to know where they were headed. These visits lasted only a day or so when Dakkar was dropping off supplies to the American soldiers and carrying out whatever business he had on the island. Possibly Lincoln Island was a supply and fuel depot. You wonder why Nemo did not rescue the castaways? Well, he could not take the chance that they had somehow discovered his secret base, yet he did not want them to die from want either. However once he made the decision to close down this base, he scuttled the *Nautilus* and arranged for their rescue.”

“Any other observations or questions, Monsieur?” The manner in which his eyes lanced into mine informed me that I should postpone any more questions.

I told him that was all that I had for now. He rose from the divan with effort, his nostrils flared and his lips pursed slightly. He was stooped and had a large hunch on his back, yet I could discern that despite this he was very tall for an Asian.

As he departed from the deck, I asked, “May have the honor of your name, Monsieur?”

His eyes bore into mine. “No, Monsieur, you may not have that honor. You may call me Hanoi Shan or Natas. They are as good of names as any other.”

He went below deck leaving me with Asian guards pointing rifles at me. Ned Land came on deck carrying a cotton work shirt and canvas dungarees.

Being an independent, stubborn soul I made several attempts to escape from the vessel in the next few weeks. Each time I was punished by tortures of great agony yet which left no permanent physical harm.

After my fourth escape attempt, following the usual session of torture I was placed in a dark room. Naked and laid spread eagle on a steel deck, my hands and feet were manacled and the manacles were welded to the steel deck.

Surrounded by impenetrable darkness, I was aware of throbbing. My head throbbed with skull wracking pain with every pulse beat. A pain echoed to a lesser extent in my wrists and ankles. After a second’s consideration, I also noted that my left ribs also throbbed with pain. There was also the deeper throbbing that I felt through my skin.

As I waited for my eyes to adjust to the dark, I strained my other senses. There was an antiseptic scent to the air and I could smell nothing over that. I heard nothing other than the beat of my heart and the sound of my breathing. Although my eyes soon made out a slight graduation of shadow, the room remained so dark that its size and shape faded from

my memory. In the course of my career I had run up against a misguided do-gooder who called himself The Nyctalope. One of the reasons that he was often so effective at thwarting the designs of some criminals, certainly not your truly, was that he supposedly possessed the ability to see in the dark. Although I had often in passing whimsically wished to possess such night vision for my own nocturnal adventuring, in this instance this ability would have made my upcoming escape so much the easier. That I would be escaping, I had no doubt.

I spent the next few hours futilely attempting to gain enough leverage to free at least one of my appendages. However I could only lift myself less than an eighth of an inch off the floor from shoulder blades to my calves, so tightly was I clamped to this steel deck. Even though my Herculean efforts had sheathed me in a second skin of perspiration, the moisture was not enough to lubricate and extricate my hands or feet.

The days passed slowly. When I was awake I was immersed in black ink. I felt as though I were chained down in the Stygian depths. The all-encompassing darkness slowly began etching its way into my soul, filling me with despair.

An illuminating realization dispelled the night that had gripped my heart. This was what he wanted. This was yet another form of torture. The isolation, the darkness and the inability to move were designed to break me, to sap my will so that when I was released I would be grateful to my captor and acquiesce to anything he demanded.

Rather than dwell on the impossibility of my situation, I instead filled the long hours with pleasant thoughts. Memories of my so brief time with my beloved Clarisse, the birth of my son, and my many victories over Inspector Ganimard lifted my heart and allowed me to leave for a time my lightless prison.

Like ice water thrown into my face the abrupt cessation of the constant throbbing of the deck brought me instantly awake.

A key turned the lock on my door. Ned Land walked into the room accompanied by two of Shan's Asians. One of these carried a rifle, the other carried a crowbar in his hand. The Asian with the rifle covered me as the one with the crowbar walked to stand above me. The man holding the rifle was large and round, and he grinned at me showing several golden teeth. I knew that given the slightest provocation, he would deftly spin the rifle and slam the butt into my skull. His bulk was deceptive under the doughy exterior hard were powerful muscles as I knew from futile punches and kicks at him. This was Wo Fat, my torturer.

I planned to feign needing help to walk and use this deception to escape. However, I did not have to play act. Upon being helped to my feet I discovered I was weak, dizzy and my limbs felt like rubber. Ned Land dressed me in a cotton work shirt and canvas dungarees. He then half carried me out of the room and put me in my previous cabin, finally allowing me to eat something. To my surprise I was given a feast fit for a king. I asked Land about this and he shrugged. "I also think Shan feels ashamed that he tortured you because he believes himself to be a man of rationality and logic and devoid of

destructive passion. Yet the combination of his injury and your refusal to kowtow makes him fly into a rage that he cannot control.”

He saw the expression my face and said, “Our jailer is a complicated man with many depths. Like you, Monsieur Lupin.”

Ned Land rose, stretching out the kinks in his legs and back and left me to my meal.

We had arrived at Lincoln Island and Ned Land spent the next two days teaching me how to use a diving suit and taking me on dives, always under the watchful eye of two rifle toting guards. He explained to me that although *The Mysterious Island* depicted the *Nautilus* being sunk in the lake inside the cavern, it was actually scuttled a mile or so from the island. Apparently Nemo did not want the castaways to try and use the submersible. Land told me that Hanoi Shan said that Verne had left a clue that the ship had left the cavern. When the castaways had returned to the cavern, they could no longer see the *Nautilus* in the waters of the lake. Hanoi Shan’ men had located the sunken submersible late last year.

Land also answered some the questions that I had felt uncomfortable asking Hanoi Shan. During one of our lunch breaks I broached the following subject.

“I did not want to discuss this when we could be heard but now that we are totally alone, I will tell you straight out. You cannot be the Ned Land that sailed with Captain Nemo.”

His face flushed with anger or embarrassment. Still I continued.

“Ned Land was, according to Verne, forty years old in 1866. That would make you about eighty-five years old. Even if Verne exaggerated your age by twenty years, you would still be sixty-five. You do not look much over fifty. I surmise that if you are Ned Land, then you are Ned Land the second who was told about the journey by his father.”

“Bright boy,” Land chuckled and filled his mouth with another rice cake. “I am eighty-four years old and I was the Ned Land that sailed with Professor Arronaxe, Conseil, and that raving maniac Captain Nemo.” His eyes flooded with anger at the mention of Nemo’s name. “And make no mistake about it, laddie me boy, Nemo was a bloody lunatic. Although some folks that read the book seem to think of him as a hero. That Chinaman we work for is also one them maniacs who see themselves freedom fighters I don’t hold a grudge again you for having hit me when you first attempted to escape because I am not a willing part of the crew.

“What does Hanoi Shan have on you? I am certain that returning to the ship that imprisoned you is not by your choice.”

Land stared at me for a few seconds and then turned away, spitting into the ocean.

“You’re right about that, forever would not be long enough so far as I am concerned. My granddaughter drowned in a suspicious accident shortly after giving birth to my great-

grandson. Then my great-grandson and his father disappeared. I went looking for them and was taken to Hanoi Shan. He told me he had kidnapped them and was holding them hostage. He had two tasks for me to perform and would free one captive for each task accomplished. One task was taking you to Captain Nemo's safe."

"What is the other task?" I prodded, feeling that he wanted to tell me but needed encouragement.

"In the mid 1870s my ship put ashore on an uncharted island in the Caribbean. We found a white haired man living on the island. He did not want to be rescued. I tried to take him by force but he beat me but good. He said he admired my spirit. He told me that he would give me a supply of a special herb that grew on the island, in return all he asked was for him to look up his family and tell them what had happened to Dan Thunden. He claimed that the herb would keep me young. Of course I did not believe it, but when I looked up his family I discovered that Dan Thunden, the captain of the *Silver Nymph*, had disappeared in 1843. So I began taking the herb, sparingly. Hanoi Shan wants me to take him to the island as the second task so he can use the herb to create an Elixir of Life."In between taking my meals and taking my diving lessons, I explored Lincoln Island. The lush verdant vegetation punctuated by a riot of colors was very beautiful. I could see how a man could come to love such living in such a place. However I could never be happy in such a place; I would rather stroll along the Champs Elysees than a sandy beach or drink coffee at sidewalk café with a charming ingénue than share a coconut with a half naked native girl. I missed the hustle and bustle of the city, the thrill of the game of bait and chase.

While making a mental map of the island, I came across the skeleton of what I thought was a dodo bird. Yet an hour later on a deserted white sand beach I also found what I thought was a large statue of a crab, until I realized that this was the bleached and sand swept shell of an actual crab some six feet tall and four feet wide.

"His genius rivals mine," spoke a voice behind me, startling me. I pride myself on always being aware of my surroundings yet Hanoi Shan had come up behind me and sat down on a boulder without my being aware of the fact.

"Dakkar had developed through his chemurgy of sea plants, a serum which increased the size of animals to titanic proportions. It would only work on the unborn; however, the changes had to take place in utero, otherwise the body was preset in a particular size. His idea was to increase the food sources of high population centers. He soon realized a basic flaw in his approach. The animals were larger and would provide more food per individual, yet each individual animal also consumed food resources geometrically to its size. In short, the large animals were ecologically unsound. Harding and his marooned companions fought off giant crabs, chickens, and bees in their four year stay on the island. The nature and results of Nemo's experiments were also either unknown to Verne or excised as being too fantastic."

The story of the young growing into giants brought to mind a rumor I had heard. "I have heard that there was an incident in England in the late 1880s or early 1890s where farm animals and even human children were growing to gigantic stature."

"Indeed, the so called boomfood of Bensington and Redwood. Is there a connection between them and Nemo? Most probably, although I do not know its nature. As you recall, I stated that Nemo was in England in 1898. At the time he was working most reluctantly for British Intelligence."

Hanoi Shan arose abruptly. "No doubt you have memorized the terrain of the island and are planning an escape despite our earlier discussions". By which he meant my torture sessions. "You may have free movement upon on the island but please do not try my patience by attempting to hide on the island.." Hanoi Shan's long fingered hands waved expansively. "Plan and plot all you wish. Know this we are over 1,200 miles from the nearest shipping lanes. The only exit from this island is the *Big Eyed Girl*, and Captain Obediah Marsh is loyal to his humble employer. Concentrate on performing your task for me and you will return home all the earlier."

Hanoi Shan strode away from me rapidly and purposefully, yet I could swear that I noticed that his gait was slightly off kilter as if he were in extreme pain.

Shortly after sunrise the next day, a cutter took Ned Land and I to the site where the *Nautilus* rested several fathoms below the ocean surface. In our preliminary explorations of the ship we soon discovered that Nemo had done more than merely scuttle and sink the submersible; he had stripped it and then used explosives to break the ship apart, to prevent its use by any other power.

Despite his supposed familiarity with the ship, Ned Land often seemed lost and puzzled by its layout. This I believed was because the ship was broken apart. After a few hours our air began to grow stale. The Chinamen manning the pumps had become lax.

As Land and I pulled ourselves up to the surface by the ropes attaching us to the cutter, a dark object floated down towards us. The closer it came the object became man shaped. Soon we were face to face with the corpse of one of the Chinamen supposed to be manning our pumps. His throat had been slashed, his chest punctured several times, and a length of chain had been wrapped about his legs. He slowly drifted down past me. Since no one was pumping air for us our efforts quickly used up our remaining air. As we neared the surface my chest felt on fire as I labored for breath.

When we broke surface, the cutter was still there but it was unmanned. In a tremendous exhibition of strength Ned Land heaved himself into the cutter. After a few moments he pulled me inside the dinghy. As we lay gasping for air, I noted that in addition to the cutter's crew the oars were also missing. Although we could not remove the diving suits, we were able to open the faceplates and so could greedily suck in lungfuls of air. We lay there gasping like two beached whales for a few moments.

Ned Land propped himself against one of the seats and turned to me. “Something very odd is going on, Arsène, my lad.”

“The fact that one of our guards was thrown into the drink and perforated like a pincushion and that the other guard and the oars have disappeared have led you to this brilliant conclusion,” I replied a bit more acidly than I intended. The recent ordeal of nearly suffocating coupled with the new torture of the afternoon beating down on us, making the diving suits into miniature ovens, made me slightly irritable.

“That’s a mystery that easily solved. These Chinese sailors are never the most reliable sorts. While we were down in the depths, they probably got in an argument over money or women or some aspect of their heathen religions. They came to blows using the oars as weapons, and when these were either broken or lost they resorted to knives.”

“So your theory is that they fought with each other and lost the oars and one was stabbed to death. Where is the other body?”

“He was probably wounded as well and got eaten by sharks. I expect Hanoi Shan will send someone to fetch us once we don’t come back. ”

Land’s theory was certainly possible but I rather doubted that events had played out that way. However I thought it politic to remain silent.

“What is odd is that the *Nautilus* is different. It is not the same vessel. It is very similar but also quite different. In the two years I was on that damned ship I learned every damned inch of it that I could, searching for a way to get off.” Pointing to the bottom of the boat he said, “That ship down there ain’t the one I was on. It didn’t look stripped so much as unfinished” He leaned closer, “And I will tell you something else, my lad. Most of the ship was destroyed by explosions but it looked to me like a lot of the damage came from something ripping it to pieces, as if searching for something” I decided not to pursue his age or identity any further. “Since Hanoi Shan is not here yet, let me ask you this. What exactly does he think will be down there? And answer me this, why would Nemo scuttle a ship and then leave anything on it?”

Land sat upright and leaned forward to keep his face out of the direct sunlight. “Damn, I wish had my pipe.” Sighing in disappointment, he directed his attention at me once more. I felt as though I were about to hear a tall tale from an old sea dog, which perhaps I did.

“There’s a lot of rumors about how Nemo was able to build the ship. Some believe he was a mechanical and ship-building genius. Others believe that he somehow got a hold of some hidden knowledge. Being from India some believe that his family had access to some ancient writings which gave directions on how to build some fantastic vehicles and weapons as depicted in one of them heathen Indian tales. Others believe that he found lost writings from Atlantis or Lemuria.” Land chuckled a bit and said, “Some even claim that he got the knowledge from people from beyond the stars. Whatever the case may be, I know that I had never seen before or seen since engines like what he had.”

“Hanoi Shan would like to have any plans like that. Nemo also mapped out where various treasure ships could be found. Hanoi Shan could use those maps to plunder the ships and make himself rich. Nemo could have also stuffed his safe with jewels and gold. As to why Nemo would leave something down there... Well, think about it. Hanoi Shan said that Nemo was still alive and still operating a submersible boat. If you were the only person in the world with a submersible boat and had the equipment to leave that ship what would be the safest place in the world to keep duplicate papers or treasure?”

As I realized what Land was getting at my pulse began to race. This put this adventure in a new light. I was not merely plundering a sunken ship; I was stealing from Captain Nemo’s bank!

By this time we were starting to roast inside our suits and so conversation died out. The lapping waves, the rocking boat and the heat and the pervasive silence lulled us to sleep.

We awoke with a start when we heard the sounds of oars slapping the water. It was evening on a dark moonless night. A light slowly glided towards our position.

We hailed the boat to lead the light directly to us. We were a bit surprised that there was no answering hail, but if the boat was filled with Chinamen it was understandable, since they usually only spoke to us to convey orders. When the boat pulled along side us we were able to discern by the lantern’s light that it contained neither Hanoi Shan nor Marsh’s men but rather a compliment of strangers. They aimed pistols at us and gestured for us to climb into their boat. Since Land and I were still in the diving suits, resistance was physically impossible.

Soon the lantern-illuminated shape of a ship hove into view. Land and I were helped up a rope ladder. Our diving suits were wrenched open. Once freed of the diving suits we were not given clothing to cover our cotton tights but were escorted at gunpoint to the main deck.

Lounging in a deck chair was a man in his mid to late thirties, dressed in an expensive, fashionable suit of clothes. He sipped at a glass of wine. Standing to his side was a figure dressed all in black, black boots, black pants, black silk shirt, and black gloves. He also wore a black mask and hood that exposed only his eyes and left a slit for a mouth. Up on the bridge there was a man of average height but with a massive build, broad-shouldered and deep-chested.

“Welcome aboard the *Macedonia*, gentleman. I am Joseph Richmond Palmure. My friend and mentor is simply called Erik. You will be our guests until it is determined whether or not your services will be needed.”

Despite his studied pose of insouciance and indifference, Monsieur Palmure had the predatory eyes of a hawk. His face was set in a charming, almost beguiling mask of pleasantries. I decided to bluff to see if I could get a response.

“So you are the phantom ship that has been trailing our wake for the past few weeks.”

Palmure cocked his head at me and shouted up to the bridge. “I thought you said that they had not spotted us, Captain.”

“He’s lying, they never saw us once. I made damned certain of it ,” shouted back a rough, deep voice.

“Then it appears Monsieur Lupin is trying to goad us into a response.” His mouth quirked into a toothless smile that was closer to a grimace. “Yes, I know your names and I know what Hanoi Shan had planned to do. However, he had planned a pitiful underwater robbery rather than our grand plan. Why simply steal the safe when you can steal the entire *Nautilus*?”

“Steal the entire ship! The blasted thing is in pieces.” Land barked.

“So much the better,” spoke the black masked man in a rich, cultured voice.

Palmure noticed that Land kept scanning the horizon.

“Hanoi Shan will not be coming to fetch you back. En route to Lincoln Island we eliminated the crew of your cutter, and then when we closed on the island, sent several landing parties to eradicate the crew and ship of Hanoi Shan.”

“Why didn’t you simply capture us when you eliminated the cutter’s crew?” I asked out of more than simple curiosity. I was trying to get a sense of how his mind worked.

Smiling slightly, he said, “To be honest I had no intention of capturing you instead to allow you to either suffocate down in the depths or die of exposure in the boat. However, Erik convinced me that we might need you as a secondary plan, in case our inside information did not work as planned.”

The massively built captain slammed a meaty fist against the steering wheel and muttered a string of curses that scorched the air.

“No offense intended to you Captain, but many things could have changed since your youth aboard the *Nautilus*.”

“What was that? He was aboard the *Nautilus*?” Land asked in shock.

“Of course you would not recognize him, Mr. Land. He was but a boy back then, one of the two cabin boys.”

Land shook his head. “There wasn’t no cabin boys on the *Nautilus*.”

Palmure laughed, “I do believe, Captain Larsen, that Mr. Land is calling you a liar.”

“Larsen!” barked Ned Land in a voice that snapped Larsen. He screamed with a killing rage, “I call him liar; I call him worse than liar. I call him liar, thief, and rapist.”

Captain Larsen grabbed the steering wheel in two hands and bellowed out a harsh laugh. “Who was it that fell to my charms, your wife or daughter, or was it perhaps your mother, sister, aunt or grandmother. Perhaps it was the entire clan, eh?”

“You damn well know you wed, bed and abandoned my daughter, leaving her with a child on the way.”

“Aye, never did wait for the pups to be born. What of it old man, are you going to kill me for having dirtied your daughter?”

“That I am.” Land started at the Captain in a rush but several of the sailors jumped on him.

Captain Larsen grabbed two baling hooks and jumped down from the bridge “Let him go you dogs, I’ll spread his guts on the deck and kick him to the sharks.” When one of Larsen’s men did not move fast enough to suit Captain Larsen, he used one of the baling hooks to grab the sailor by the shoulder, ripping a gash across the man’s back as Larsen heaved him out of the way.

Erik placed a gloved hand on Palmure’s shoulder and pressed once.

“Stop this, it can only end badly,” Erik advised Palmure in a low but melodic voice.

Palmure shrugged away the hand. “We have nothing to worry about and it should prove very entertaining.” His eyes glimmered with amusement. His placid grin seemed rather fiendish to me.

The sailors, holding Ned Land down, scattered as Captain Larsen approached and finally stood above him. That Ned was on his back and weaponless did not matter to Larsen. He was going to gut him without a thought. I cast about looking for a weapon to help Land but all I could see was a belaying pin. Grabbing this I made my throw, hoping that I had timed it correctly. The belaying pin hit Captain Larsen on the crown of his head as he bent over to slash open Ned Land’s stomach, and knocked him backwards to land on his rear.

When it bounced off of Larsen’s head the belaying pin landed on Ned Land’s stomach. From where he sat on the deck, Larsen pointed the hook in his right hand at me and screamed a stream of curses, the gist of which was that I was next.

Larsen sprang to his feet with an agility that was almost wolf-like, the two hooks in his hands slashing down like the claws of an attacking animal. Land was, however, on his feet by now. He hit Larsen’s left arm with pin hard enough so that the bone broke with an

audible snap and the hook went flying from his hand. Although Larsen howled with pain he still had the tenacity to slash out at Ned Land. The hook scored a terrific slash across Land's face from cheek to cheek and ripped off the tip of his nose.

Blood sheeted across the lower part of Land's face. Ned spat a thick reddish gob at Larsen's eyes as he slammed the belaying pin into Larson's left knee. Although you could hear the crack of Larsen's knee breaking, he jumped forward slashing at Land's throat with the baling hook. Ned ducked the blow, but not fast enough. A deep furrow was cut across his forehead, pouring blood into his eyes.

Although Larsen fell to the deck, he was not out of the fight. He took advantage of Ned Land's temporary blindness to swing at the hand with the belaying pin. He missed the hand but knocked the pin from Ned's hand. Larsen's back slash ripped a deep cut into Ned Land's stomach. Ned grabbed his wound, vainly striving to hold it shut. He staggered about on deck, dying on his feet.

Larson laughed, "I told you I would spill your guts on my deck."

Ned Land was however not stumbling about without a purpose. Reaching the side of the boat, he grabbed a harpoon from its holster. With one hand he hefted and threw the harpoon in a short arc, to transfix Larsen through the groin, pinning him to the deck.

Ned then fell forward onto his face. I rushed to his side without being stopped by Larsen's crew. They were all watching the Captain fight to free himself from the harpoon pinning him. I thought it was a testament to Larsen's character that no one rushed to help him.

Ned Land eyes were bright and smiling, starkly juxtaposing the mask of blood covering his face. Bright teeth flashed within the same dark mask. "At least I finally found and got the black-hearted scoundrel." His face turned serious as the lights of his eyes began to dim. "Arsène, my lad, do me one last favor. Make certain that Chinee devil releases my great-grandson and his father."

I told him I would but I believe by then that he was past hearing.

Larsen cursed with more strength than I thought possible for a man in condition. "Hey Old Man, I never had yer dotter. God curse it, t'was my brother."

What happened next was truly remarkable. Larsen managed to unpin himself from the deck pulling the harpoon barb free by wriggling his hips and back. Each movement must have torn the flesh surrounding the harpoon ever wider. I am still amazed that Larsen could even move much less free himself, considering his stomach wound as well as the broken leg and arm that he had sustained in his fight. Despite the excruciating agony he must have felt unless he was already numb with shock, Larsen then sat up and pushed the harpoon further into his groin. Reaching behind him with his good hand, he snapped the barb off and pulled the two sections of the harpoon out of his body.

He called for his crew to help him to his feet but no one moved. He cursed them all and used the harpoon shaft to help him to his feet, ignoring the pain of his broken knee and the copious amount of blood and bile leaking from his stomach wound. He walked a couple of steps towards his cabin door and then suddenly sagged, slowly sliding down the harpoon pole until he sat on the deck, grasping the pole like a flagless banner.

Larsen spat a curse and then laughed softly. "Ah, God, where is the justice for me to die for one of Wolf's sins?"

Palmure watched this episode with a mixture of avid fascination and shock. At the end however, although his face never lost its mask of congeniality, his eyes were filled with rage. I do not know if it was rage at Larsen for having lost the fight or rage at his allowing his own bloodlust to throw a very large monkey wrench in his plans.

"Well, it seems as though your services will be needed after all Monsieur Lupin, since our combination to the safe just died." In a fit of pique he threw his wine glass at Larsen's corpse. "Throw that offal off the ship and feed it to the sharks."

I made my mind at that second to get off of this ship of madmen. During Captain Larsen's attempt to walk to his cabin I had palmed and secreted the broken barb from the harpoon. While the bodies were thrown overboard, I dashed forward and grabbed one of the two fallen baling hooks. Running across the deck I hooked three oil lanterns. With the haft of the baling hook in my mouth, I quickly climbed the mast ropes. A bullet pinged off the mast near my head.

"Don't shoot him you blundering idiots, we need him alive!" Palmure screamed in rage. He composed himself again and calmly asked, "Really Monsieur Lupin what do you hope to accomplish? You cannot get off this ship. Certainly you are not foolish enough to try and swim to the island in the dark."

Once I had reached a high enough point I stopped my ascent and quickly threw the three lanterns, one each to the front, rear, and center of the ship. I had planned to swim to the island with the burning ship to light my way. However before I could dive, there was an ominous whistling followed by an explosion that rocked the deck below me. The mast I was on snapped and tumbled down towards the dark ocean. Cold water slammed the breath out of me, something struck my head, and I sank into the depths.

Terrible dreams of torture that left no marks, tortures of water, electricity, and lack of air caused me to awaken with a start. A grinning round face with golden teeth swam before my eyes.

I sat up shaking with rage. It took me a moment to realize that I was once again back in my cabin on the *Big Eyed Girl*. Fresh clothing was at the foot of my bed.

When I reached the deck I thought I was still asleep, still dreaming. Sitting at a table having pleasant conversation were Hanoi Shan, Monsieur Palmure and Erik.

Spotting me Palmure grinned ferociously, letting me know that despite my best efforts he had triumphed.

Hanoi Shan waved for me to sit next to Erik.

“These fish survived the bombardment and destruction of their ship. Although they deserve death for having committed piracy upon our party; they have convinced me that they should be given a stay of execution and perhaps a pardon. They have a very intriguing plan. If it works, Monsieur Lupin, you will not have to don the diving suit again.”

I was still groggy from sleep and had not yet eaten so I spoke more openly that I had planned. “Their plan to raise the *Nautilus*? What do a grifter with sadistic tendencies and an Opera Ghost know about nautical engineering?”

“Before taking residence inside the Paris Opera House, Erik was also a renowned engineer and architect.”

Palmure answered, his usually jovial tone having a bit of a bite to it.

Hanoi Shan explained how Erik planned to raise the sections of the *Nautilus* using a helium filled balloon. Each raised section would then be towed to the island where the ship would be reassembled. Hanoi Shan disagreed with Erik about using helium. They argued back and forth about volume, pressures, lifting capacities, and the like. I half listened, filing away the information but also running through possible escape avenues. In the end I decided that I might as well wait until the safe had been opened.

It was finally decided that they would use hydrogen, created through electrolysis to fill the balloon which would then raise the sections of the ship. The first section of the *Nautilus* to be raised would be the section containing Nemo’s safe; that way if they could not raise the entire ship, then the expedition would not be a total loss.

Most of the diving and rigging of the balloon were done by Captain Marsh’s sailors, who proved to be most excellent swimmers and divers, almost as if they were part fish. Oddly enough most of Marsh’s crewmen bore very similar physical features, large bulging eyes, very small ears, large feet and hands and an odd almost greenish blue tinge to their tanned skins. There must have been a lot of inbreeding in that town in Massachusetts from where they hailed. They spent a week exploring the wreck. It had been well stripped and no treasures were to be found, yet the safe still remained.

I spent my time becoming as acquainted with as many of the crew as I could. Hanoi Shan only deigned to meet with Erik and only then to discuss particulars of the salvage operation.

Erik was also a solitary man refusing to discuss any aspect of his life, although he could be drawn into discussions about music and art.

Monsieur Palmure spent his days aboard ship as if he were a gentleman of leisure spending his days along the avenues of Paris. He strolled on the beach, played cards and spent hours lounging in a deck chair, smoking and drinking coffee or wine. He had a beguiling charm that was often hard to resist even though I could see that it was only a façade. He had convinced Erik that he was his true friend, although I doubted this. I do not believe that Monsieur Palmure truly had friends about whom he cared. He viewed other people as pieces in his game of life. In many ways Palmure was a rogue after my own heart, yet unlike me there resided in him a great anger and a great insanity. Although he never spoke the truth about his background, I could glean a few things from his various stories. One was that he was of illegitimate birth, that his family was of the aristocracy, but because of his illegitimacy, he was shunned. For this he hated the aristocracy and this transcended into a hatred of the social order as a whole. His hatred had led him to various acts of violence that were traced back to him. He had fled the continent and used the Boer War as a pretext travel to Africa. In Africa he had carried out a good many grifts and had made the acquaintance of Erik, who was in Africa, searching for a man named Kathulos, whom he thought might be his father.

When I asked how Palmure had known about Hanoi Shan's plans, he leaned back in his deck chair and smoked contemplatively. Finally he gave me a judicious look and told me a tale that I believe was at least sixty percent true.

Palmure said that after some unpleasantness in South Africa, Erik and he had decided to return to Paris, they would use their combined genius to create a criminal empire among the disorganized members of the underworld. They would then use this power base to erode the corrupt structure of society and create chaos. They believed chaos would cause the emergence of a new social order. I did not doubt that he wished to create chaos, but rather doubted that he wanted to create a new society. It is my firm belief that Monsieur Palmure liked destruction and death because it amused him; he hated society and cared nothing about people. While I pitted myself against the police and various dunderheads of society, this was a game of wits and skill. The games that Monsieur Palmure would play were likely to involve gruesome death.

Upon arriving in Paris Erik and Palmure had discovered that an Asian named Hanoi Shan had already pulled together various criminal organizations and made himself the leader of organized crime in Paris. Various of Palmure's spies detailed Shan's organization. Palmure planned to take over Shan's organization but Shan abruptly began making preparations to leave Paris. Wondering if what Shan's game was Palmure took the risk of contacting someone inside Shan's organization.

By seducing one of the women in Shan's personal entourage, Palmure had learned of the trip to salvage Captain Nemo's safe. Having learned of this, Erik told Palmure that he might be able to raise the *Nautilus*. Palmure had previously made the acquaintance of Captain Death Larsen in Africa.

Palmure knew that Larsen had been involved with opium smuggling, arms smuggling into China, blackbirding, and open piracy. It had been simple enough to convince Larsen to join the expedition; all he needed was a bit of cash and threats of exposure to the authorities of several nations. Originally Palmure had planned to seize the safe once it had been opened, but Larsen had convinced Palmure and Erik that he had been a cabin boy on the *Nautilus* and was well aware of the combination.

I found myself laughing at that.

For a second, Palmure fixed me with a look of murderous hatred which mercurially vanished from his eyes as he joined in the laughter. "I should have doubted his story when he also claimed that Nemo was Polish and his father to boot. It reminds of the lunatic theory that there were two *Nautilus* ships."

I had not heard that one. Palmure said that some researcher had resolved the discrepancies in *The Mysterious Island* by theorizing there were two *Nautilus* submersibles and two Captain Nemos.

We sipped our wine and laughed long and hard at that dreamy-eye'd theorist.

A few days later the first section of the *Nautilus* was raised by Erik's improbable design.

Along with the rest of the crew, I watched the spot of the ocean where the first piece of the *Nautilus* was to be lifted. The pumps ran for what seemed an eternity as hydrogen was forced into the underwater balloon. In a few moments there was a spume of water and a large piece of rusted and barnacled metal popped up to float on the water courtesy of the thick rubberized canvas that filled its interior. The *Big Eyed Girl* turned and made for the shores of Lincoln Island, towing the piece of wreckage behind us.

We were about a mile out from Lincoln Island when someone shouted from the deck. I turned to see three flaming arrows plunk in a triangular pattern into the skin of the inflated hydrogen balloon. The hydrogen ignited with a great explosion, blasting apart the *Nautilus* section and severing our towing chain.

Several of Marsh's sailors jumped over the side of the ship. A few of the Chinese jumped into boats rowing rapidly towards the sinking balloon, yet they were not quick enough. Captain Nemo's safe was once again claimed by the ocean depths.

There was a struggle on the deck and one of sailors rescued from Larsen's ship fell to the deck with a knife in his chest. In his hands was a small bow and an arrow covered with pitch. The man who had killed him was also from Larsen's ship.

Hanoi Shan walked over to the two men in his shambling, pain wracked gait. His luminous green eyes took in the scene. Fixing his eyes upon the man who had killed the saboteur, Hanoi Shan stated, "Pity, you were unable to stop him without killing him. It

would have been interesting to question his motives.” I could sense a slight edge of menace and also sarcasm in Hanoi Shan’ voice.

“He gave me no choice but to kill him, sir,” said the sailor with a distinct accent, sounding as though he were from the Southern United States.

Hanoi Shan’ eyes shone with a fierce rage for a split second. The flash of anger made it seem as though a luminous film had momentarily covered his eyes. “No, doubt,” he snapped and walked back to his divan.

The balloon was destroyed and we did not have the materials to make another. Marsh also claimed that the monsoon season was fast approaching which would make salvage operations extremely difficult, if not impossible. Over Erik and Palmure’s objections, Hanoi Shan decided to put all efforts to retrieving Captain Nemo’s safe before we had to leave.

This was not to be as easy as first thought. Whether by chance or design the saboteur’s timing had been nearly perfect. The section of the *Nautilus* had landed, precariously, on a ridge of an ocean trench. Had it fallen all the way into the trench, retrieval would have been impossible. Hanoi Shan believed that there was only one chance and that was to open the safe underwater. The safe was too deep for direct air lines, so the diver would have to carry his own air supply. Since the section was slipping off of the ridge there was only time for one quick dive.

Of course only one person could dive down into the depths, break the combination, open the safe, retrieve the contents, and return to the surface before he ran out of air; this was the greatest thief in the world. Me. While I tried to avoid the honor of being the person to rob Captain Nemo’s safe so far down in the depths, Hanoi Shan would not be demurred.

Hanoi Shan explained that due to the depth I would be diving, when I returned to the surface I would probably experience what some divers called the bends or caissons disease. However, he had invented a gas mixture that would alleviate my symptoms. Chosen to accompany me on the dive was Wo Fat, my former torturer. His presence was no doubt to ensure that I carried out the service for Hanoi Shan, and possibly to prevent my return to the surface. Just before we had the diving helmets wrenched on, he grinned at me and snapped his teeth. That sarcastic bite brought to mind the sadistic grin he often had while making me writhe in agony.

The safe had landed flat on its back. However, there was something very odd. The safe’s front had been scored with a number of lateral slashes, as if clawed.

To open Captain Nemo’s safe was one of the greatest challenges of my long career. Although I could lie down and press my head and body against the safe as I worked, I could barely feel the movement of the tumblers through my diving gloves. Hearing the clicks was also nearly impossible through my helmet.

It took me nearly three quarters of an hour to feel out the tumblers of the first lock. I had only fifteen minutes to finish the job. I knew that Wo Fat would make me finish the job until I was nearly dead from suffocation.

Since trying to feel out the combination was taking so long, I began to try a more logical approach. The first combination had ended in 27. That would have been about the same year as Nemo or Prince Dakkar was born. Therefore the first combination may have been his birthdate. It is a common practice and one that makes my job much easier. Therefore the other combinations were probably also dates important to Nemo. Wracking my brain for dates from the two Verne book, I ran through a series of rapid combinations. The second lock opened for 5-9-57, the date of the Sepoy Rebellion. The last date was very difficult until I realized what was *the* pivotal date in the life of Captain Nemo. It took me about two hundred rapid combinations until I got it correctly. 1-1-64, the date that the *Nautilus* was launched.

The safe opened with a bubble of escaping air. Inside were several papers, stiff and covered with a transparent lacquer that made them waterproof. Running low on air, I began rolling them up and stuffing them into the water proof tubes that we had brought. As I rolled them up I saw that the papers were all that Hanoi Shan had desired. There were schematics for various advanced devices and vehicles written in what looked to be Sanskrit. There were also what appeared to chemical texts of some type, although written in notations of which I was unfamiliar. There were maps of various locations on the ocean floor that depicted the names of sunken ships and cities.

All of these papers fit into one of the tubes. Wo Fat quickly snatched this from my grasp.

There were two more papers. These very old documents were covered in a form of script that I had never seen before. For some reason, even through my diving gloves, I felt a sense of touching something very slimy. Looking at this script I felt a wave of dizziness and nausea. At the time I attributed this to my air having been exhausted. Stuffing these last two papers into my tube, I began swimming upwards. Wo Fat swam close to me.

As we swam up towards the surface, I saw a school above us. I had once told Nelly Underdown that Arsène Lupin always concentrates his thoughts not only on the theft, but on all the circumstances connected with it. When I spoke to her it was concerning how Lupin, that is I, protected his identities. Yet in many regards I always took care when undertaking a job to think of the consequences of my actions. How would I be affected first and foremost, but also how my victims would be affected. In this particular theft I had to wonder how the world as a whole would be affected. What would be the consequence of giving the keys to a vault of such knowledge to Hanoi Shan and Monsieur Palmure? This coupled with access to treasures that could fund their creation of such device. If that school of sharks swimming above me were suddenly given human intelligence and the ability to make war, what would be the consequence for life in the sea? Giving Hanoi Shan and Palmure these plans would be giving a human sharks a major advantage over the rest of the human race. Hanoi Shan and Palmure would war on humanity to no good end.

Even if they used the technology sparingly it could have consequences for me. While Hanoi Shan might make the technology for war, Palmure would use it for his chosen career of crime. His technological war against the forces of law would be successful at first but there would be a counter attack. Since many wars spur technological advancement, so could this war. Palmure's efforts could result in stronger law enforcement and much more advanced security measures. In short, it would make my chosen profession much more difficult. While I enjoy a challenge, I must admit that I liked the way things were at the present time. Although I realized that such technological advancement was inevitable, I did not see any reason to hasten the process.

Still, I might have swum to the surface and allowed Hanoi Shan to have the papers, but as we began to rapidly climb to the surface, my skin began to itch and my joints began to ache terribly. Wo Fat smacked me with the tube to hasten my swim upwards. Hours and hours of torture suddenly flashed through my mind. The school of sharks swam closer to us, no doubt investigating these strange fish invading their territory. Rolling about in a semi-delirium I could see the dark underside of the *Big Eyed Girl* and I had a vision of sharks aboard the ship waiting for secrets from Captain Nemo's safe.

With a twist of my wrist I popped out a broken harpoon barb from where I had secreted inside my diving glove. This was from the harpoon that had killed Captain Larsen which I had carried as a sort of good luck piece since that night. I drove the sharp point straight into Wo Fat's stomach and twisted; blood and air geysered from his midsection. Grabbing the tube from his hands I stuffed it deep into his wound. I swam away from him as rapidly as I could. The sharks converged on him. Biting into his soft belly, one of the sharks also swallowed the blood covered tube containing the papers from Nemo's safe. I rose to the surface as rapidly as I could. Breaking the surface, I opened my face plate and sucked in gulps of air.

My joints were wracked with pain and I felt nauseous. I was pulled into a rowboat and helped aboard the *Big Eyed Girl*. My diving suit was removed and I was laid upon the deck before Hanoi Shan's divan.

I rapidly told Hanoi Shan that the safe had contained all that he had desired but a school of sharks attacked and killed Wo Fat, despite my efforts to save him. Loyal to the end, Wo Fat had refused to give me the papers

Hanoi Shan stood up from his divan and raised his long nailed hands. He fanned out his fingers and curled them slightly as if wishing to throttle me. His eyes were bright emeralds of rage. He balled his long fingered hands into fists and screamed a curse at me in Chinese. His foot swung out and caught me in the chest. I believe the effort pained him more than it did me. He stumbled backwards a few steps and then regained his composure. With restrained emotions and all the dignity he could muster, he returned to his divan. He gestured for the pouch to be brought to him.

A sudden convulsion seized me and I vomited. Because of my disfavor with Hanoi Shan no one moved to aid me.

Hanoi Shan quickly scanned the documents. Proclaiming that they were either gibberish or an unknown language that would take years to translate, he threw them away from him and glared at me anew. I knew that I was in for a rough time, that this time the torture would probably end in my death. I crawled for the side of the ship.

“May I see them documents, sir?” Captain Obediah Marsh asked Hanoi Shan.

Hanoi Shan gave Marsh a piercing, questioning look. Marsh shrugged his thick shoulders, “I am familiar with some of the scribblings of the South Seas folk. Maybe it will match one them and we can find out where it originated.”

Hanoi Shan handed the documents to Marsh without comment, his eyes locked upon me.

Marsh started for his cabin but then darted up onto the bridge. He pulled a white tube from his pocket which appeared to be an intricately carved whistle or flute. He began blow an odd tune.

Hanoi Shan gestured for his men to retrieve the documents but discovered that Marsh’s men had taken up position around Hanoi Shan’s men and trained rifles on all of them.

Captain Obediah Marsh began to read from the documents of “gibberish.”

I had pulled myself up the side rail to throw myself into the ocean but saw water began to break around all sides of the ship. Out of the ocean came monstrosities that quickly clambered up the sides of the ship. They were grayish green in color with white bellies. They seemed a combination between man, fish, and frog. Their bulging eyes made reminded me of the similar strange trait shared by Captain Marsh and crew. Another wave of nausea seized me as I realized the connection.

As Captain Marsh continued to chant, the seas turned wine dark and churned with colossal waves. A maelstrom of mist and wave formed off our bow. Marsh chanted and the maelstrom grew wider, a dark fog filling its center. The fog flowed into a monstrous shape, a giant version of the fish-men now hopping onto the decks.

At the sight of these monstrosities, Marsh’s crew dropped their weapons and knelt in supplication. The fish-men attacked and wantonly slaughtered the men on the ship; it did not matter to them if these were Hanoi Shan’s men or Marsh’s men.

While Marsh’s crew allowed themselves be killed as sacrifices to their dark god, Hanoi Shan’s men fought back. Erik and Monsieur Palmure killed several of the fish-men with any weapons they could get their hands on, fallen pistols, baling hooks, knives, etc. Hanoi Shan did not move from his divan but he fought bravely against the invaders. His hands were a blur of movement; his long nails slashing the fish-men like so many deadly knives.

Since everyone was occupied with the invaders, it was up to me to save the day, although I was still half crippled with the bends. According to alchemy, I knew the enemies of Water are Fire and Earth. Grabbing

hold of a sail line, I wrapped it about my arm and leg and launched myself to swing across the deck directly at Obediah Marsh.

Just as he uttered the words, “Ia! Ia! Dagon fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Dagon Yhe-nai wgah-nagl fhtaga,” he looked up to see me swinging directly at him. I drove the harpoon barb into his throat and kicked at the lantern, breaking it open against his chest, and pushing me away from him. Obediah Marsh and the paper he was reading became engulfed in flame. Screaming in pain and rage, his flaming figure ran towards the main deck. To prevent yet another calamity I swung back at him and took hold of him by his hair. We swung out over the ocean and I dropped him. Yet in doing so I lost my grip on the rope and fell into the ocean. I landed near the maelstrom and it took all of my remaining strength to fight against the current.

Marsh was not so fortunate; he was swept into the current and swirled into the maelstrom. The burning papers flew from his hands and wafted through the air like flaming kites on the winds.

The burning papers flew from his hands and wafted through the air like flaming kites on the winds.

The giant monstrosity inside the maelstrom opened its mouth and swallowed Marsh like a toad swallowing a mouse.

My strength was exhausted from fighting the wind and the water. A long tongue lashed out from the monstrosity’s mouth, straight at me like a frog’s tongue after a fly. Just before the tongue touched me, the last bit of the burning paper floated over my head. It crumbled into ash and the maelstrom winked out of existence, as did the giant monstrosity. The wine dark seas began to clear and soon returned to normal. I slowly and painfully dog-paddled towards the *Big Eyed Girl*. I now knew the reason for the ship’s name— this was one woman I never wanted to meet in real life.

Hanoi Shan and Palmure had survived the attack. Erik had been swept overboard while grappling with one of the fish-men. To my surprise Palmure was truly saddened by the loss of Erik. As he explained it, Erik was a mentor to him who had accepted him as he was and not how he was wished to be. Although I confess I did not quite understand that, I pretended as though I did. It saved me from a prolonged conversation with Palmure.

Hanoi Shan declared this mission a loss and announced he would be returning to France. Fortunately, having saved his life, he was no longer enraged at me, although I kept a wide berth of him. He became quite chummy with Palmure however, which I thought was quite odd.

A few days after leaving Lincoln Island, I was asked to meet Hanoi Shan in his cabin for lunch. I arrived early and found the door locked. With more brass than brains, I picked the lock and silently entered the room.

What I saw made me keep as silent as I could. Hanoi Shan was naked from the waist up but I saw no malformations on his chest or shoulders. When he turned to stand before a floor length mirror, I saw his back. He did not have a hunch, although there were many scars along his backbone and shoulders. On closer look his back did seem a bit disjointed and it seemed to have eyehooks jutting out from the skin along his back and neck. Hanoi Shan strapped what appeared to be a heavy device on his shoulders.

Without turning back around, he said, "Now I may use your assistance, Monsieur Lupin."

Since he had obviously known I was there all along, I came forward. He directed me to take certain leather straps that hung from the heavy device on his shoulders and string them through the eyehooks in an intricate but specific pattern. When this was finished he donned a robe. The combination of the device and his robe gave him the look of a hunchback.

"It is a measure of my trust that I allowed you to see this." He pointed to his back with a long tapering nail. This device will straighten my back which was once broken but knitted back crookedly. The injury was the result of a disagreement with the Empress Dowager."

We sat down to a lunch of rice, fish, and vegetables. We ate in silence. After the meal was finished, Hanoi Shan turned his eyes directly on me and said, "I had thought to have you punished and then killed for disposing of Captain Nemo's treasures, but as Captain Marsh showed us, sometimes knowledge comes with a terrible price. I intend, when we return to Paris, to return to creating a criminal empire. You could be very useful in this endeavor."

"I appreciate the offer, but I have always been a solitary operative."

"I thought that would be your reply. However, I hope that if the opportunity should arise you will not be as foolish as to decline to do an occasional service for me."

No, I would not be that foolish. "I would be honored, Hanoi Shan"

Amusement glittered in his emerald eyes. "What do you think of our friend, Monsieur Palmure?"

Once again I believed that the truth was required. "I think he is a dangerous man, a maniac in the making, a murderer without conscience. I can say this with assurance, having taken the measure of the man, although I do not know of his true background or of any crimes that he has committed."

“You are very perceptive. Erik was his conscience; however, Erik is missing and may be gone. But given the rumors of Erik’s parentage, he may not be so easy to kill.” Hanoi Shan answered my unspoken question. “His father is rumored to be Gouroull, the monster created by Baron von Frankenstein.”

He continued with his previous subject. “The criminal empire of which I spoke is but one aspect of a much larger life’s work. Young Monsieur Palmure has the potential to aid me in my work. Once I have cured myself of this affliction, he can run the Paris underworld with my blessing. The chaos he will create will aid in my larger plans.”

“Although our voyage did not achieve the goal I had wished, it was not without reward.” He opened a chest which was filled with Spanish doubloons, pieces of jewelry, pearls, and jewels. “This was found at the bottom of the cavern on Lincoln Island where the *Nautilus* was supposedly sunk. This was a treasure cache left by Nemo. I imagine he will be quite perturbed to find it missing.” He smiled at the thought.

I asked him what he thought of the various theories about the *Nautilus*, given the discrepancies not only in the accounts of *20,000 Leagues* and *The Mysterious Island*, but also in the differences in the ships as noted by Ned Land, and the tale told by Death Larsen.

He pondered the question for a moment before answering. “I suppose that there could have been two ships and two Captains Nemos, if they were part of wider organization. Nemo means ‘no one’ so Nemo could be title instead of a name. However it seems more likely that there was one Captain Nemo with three ships. The first *Nautilus* was finished in 1866 and that is the one that went sailing about the world as described by Verne. The second *Nautilus* was kept in harbor here; it was not finished, and I so believe that it was a prototype. Possibly Nemo was trying a different power source or engine design. Nemo kept returning to Lincoln Island during the 1865 to 1869 period to work on the unfinished ship. It was in this period that he also aided the castaways he found here. I believe that he was never able to work out the problems with the second ship, although after the first one was destroyed in the maelstrom, he turned all of his efforts to trying to get the one on Lincoln Island working yet he failed. In 1869, he decided to scuttle the entire ship and start from scratch. However, he used the sunken ship as a cache for those documents. He built a third ship which is the one he is using currently.”

Gesturing to the treasure chest, Hanoi Shan said, “Take three pieces as part of your payment.”

I picked out three large stones, a ruby, sapphire, and emerald. However, remembering a promise I had made I dropped them back into the chest.

“For my payment I would rather have you release Ned Land’s relatives.”

“Interesting, you will forgo payment in return for keeping a promise to a dead man? Very honorable. I grant your request. It is done.”

Although I realized he was telling the truth, I had the nagging suspicion that I was being tricked. Then I realized that it was not just me that had been tricked.

“You never kidnapped them, you discovered that Land was looking for them and claimed to have kidnapped them so he would do as you asked.”

“Very perceptive. I do not know where they are. Doctor Wildman or Savage or whatever it is he calls himself now, has published some unorthodox ideas about child rearing, I suspect he is using his son as a test subject and did not know what Land to know about it. However, I still consider that your request has been fulfilled,” he said with a small smile. He slammed the chest shut with alacrity that would have removed my fingers had I not jerked them away.

“It was entertaining discussing various subjects with you, Monsieur Lupin. Perhaps we shall do so again tonight. It is supposed to be nice moonlit night. We are not too distant from the shores of South America. I thought perhaps I might see if I could catch a glimpse of the shore.”

I took that as a dismissal. Hanoi Shan did not walk the decks that night, but I did. Once I saw the shoreline outlined in the moonlight, I stole a launch and rowed to shore.

A few days later I was sitting in sipping crème de menthe at a café in Rio de Janeiro, attired in a fashionable suit. I had, of course, palmed the three stones out of Hanoi Shan's chest, and had taken three more for good measure. In return I had left my calling card, “Compliments of Arsène Lupin, Gentleman Burglar.” I had a few days to wait before I could get a berth on a luxury liner traveling to France.

A man walked up to my table and sat down. He too was well attired. With a start I recognized him as one of the crew members from the *Big Eyed Girl*. He was in fact the one who had killed the man who had sabotaged the hydrogen balloon.

“Many people will not be pleased that you destroyed the documents in Captain Nemo's safe; they believe that those documents would have aided our defense and made France the pre-eminent world power. So it would not be wise to return to Paris so quickly. However, the intelligence branch of the French government is pleased that you did keep the documents out of the hands of Hanoi Shan and also that you kept them out of the hands of our own government. Unstable elements in our nation would have used this technology to make France great again by means of war and conquest. Whether we like it or not, we are now part of a family of nations. Acting on our own so aggressively would create a ripple effect with terrible consequences. The continent and perhaps the world would have been plunged into a horrific conflict.”

“You were the one that blew up the balloon to keep the safe out of Hanoi Shan's hands. You were planted on Larsen's boat when it was learned that Nemo might be involved.”

“Guilty as charged.” He waved to the waiter and ordered a drink. “I jumped ship about an hour before you did. My mission had been accomplished.” He lit a cigarette and sipped at his drink. “You realize of course that I was not lying about your life being in danger if you return to France. However that does not mean that you cannot be gainfully employed and help your country at the same time. We can use a man with your intelligence, talents, and luck.”

I made the decision to work for French intelligence at that moment. This could only help me in my career as the world’s greatest thief. Not only would I be working for the greater glory of France, but I would gain access to an organization that could supply me with information, provide me with various skills, and give me political and legal support.

“I will be your contact. You may call me by the code name that has been in my family for generations because we gain access where access is often thought impossible. I am Passepartout.”

“That would mean that...”

Passepartout smiled and waved his hand in my face, “Classified, my friend. Tell me, Monsieur Lupin, have you ever been to Uruguay? No, well there a situation we need resolved...”

I must close this narrative at this point since what transpired after that is strictly confidential.

Epilogue:

Hanoi Shan, or as he was known to the Parisian police, NS or “L’ Araignee,” ruled the Parisian underworld from 1905 until 1910, although the Sûreté did not become aware of him until 1906. History has come to call Hanoi Shan by several names; foremost among them is Dr. Fu Manchu.

Monsieur Palmure succeeded Hanoi Shan as the king of the Parisian Underworld, although he went by the nom de guerre, Fantômas, perhaps in honor of his friend Erik, the Phantom. As Lupin suspected, Fantômas was a psychopath who played at terror and destruction as if it were a game.

Before returning to France in early 1905, Arsène Lupin traveled to Uruguay, Antarctica, Saigon, Armenia, and Turkey. If he was indeed carrying out missions for French Intelligence, they remain classified. It is known that in Turkey he fought and defeated the Red Sultan.

If Arsène Lupin had further contact with Hanoi Shan or Fantômas, it has not yet been recorded but may be one day.