



## Tom Swift and the The Loch Carlopa Monster

By T. Edward Fox

Dinosaur bones have been discovered near the Shopton Yacht Club. Seemingly before anyone can even dig up more than a nasal arch and a couple toes, an amateur sleuth with an international reputation appears on Tom Swift's doorstep demanding that Tom be part of a search.

For what?

For the monster that lies deep under the surface of Lake Carlopa. Just like its cousin in Scotland, it is said to appear and disappear, amazing the locals and scaring tourists. The only problem is, according to Tom nobody has ever heard of it, much less seen it.

With little solid proof, Tom decides that the man and his companion may provide enough to intrigue him into trying to find a way to search for the elusive beast.

Does Shopton have its own infamous lake monster?

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This story is dedicated to skeptics and the generally harmless idiots that keep us going. From the 'End of the world is nigh,' doomsayers to the '...and then they shoved this probe up inside my...' sorts. What they convince themselves they have seen, heard or even tasted provide much needed fodder and amusement for the rest of us.

SWIFT ENTERPRISES PRESENTS A BONUS

**The Loch Carlopa Monster**

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## FOREWORD

Tom Swift has worked with and for a lot of people in his two decades on this planet. Most are professionals and he relies on their training, dedication and skills.

Then, there is his latest... client? Assistant? Individual who is just sane enough to get Tom's attention but not dangerous enough to get either of them into trouble? Yeah. Probably that one.

With Bud laid up from appendicitis and his parents and sister out of town, Tom might have thought he would finally get to spend a lot of time with his girl, Bashalli. This is not to be as her parents spirit her away to California and a visit with her ailing uncle.

What can Tom do to pass the time? He is, after all, between projects.

I was as intrigued by the stranger as Tom was. Strangers actually, for where one goes the other is certain to follow. Just as in the Westerns, each hero must have a sidekick, and the sidekick must provide both grounding and some comic relief.

I think Tom discovered a good combination in these two.

Enjoy!

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*Victor Appleton II*

**PART 1****She's Nay Nessie... She's Carlie!**

“WHILE THAT is fascinating, Mr. Mayor, and I would normally be delighted to participate, I have to tell you that my schedule is about to become very crowded while I take the reins, so to speak, at Swift Enterprises in my father's absence. That, plus I really feel that my expertise lies in other directions. Certainly not archeology.”

He politely finished the conversation and hung up the phone as his mother came back down the stairs and handed him a small suitcase.

“What did the Mayor want, Tom?” she asked.

“He wants me to be part of a press conference on those bones they've been finding over in the lake. I'm not an archeologist and really don't have the desire to pretend to know anything about them,” he stated.

“Can you be a dear, then, and put that in the back seat of the car? I want to make sure to have that in the cabin. My knitting and a few books.” She was wearing a bright summer dress that was a little inappropriate for the cool weather Shopton, New York was experiencing on the first week of summer.

“Glad to, Momsie,” he said favoring her with a big grin. He went out the side door and placed the bag on the floor behind the driver's seat.

When he went back inside all three of the family

members—his mother, father and sister, Sandy—were going over a checklist.

“Mother!” Sandy said in exasperation. “We've been over this something like a million times. We have everything any of us will need for a month long stay, not the two weeks we'll be in California. Come on. Let's get this show on the road!”

Anne Swift looked at her husband for support. He gave her a soft smile and slightly shook his head. “I've got nothing, sweetheart. Sandy's right. We need to be at the airport in thirty minutes and your list will take up half that time. What you forget we'll buy once we get there.”

Damon Swift gave his son a look that said, “*This is what you put up with for the love of a good woman.*”

Tom drove his family to the airport and waited with them until their plane for San Francisco began boarding. Giving both ladies a kiss and his father a handshake, Tom walked briskly out of the terminal, climbed into the family sedan and drove off. He arrived at Swift Enterprises thirty minutes later having stopped for gasoline.

“Did they get off alright?” the ever-efficient secretary Tom shared—along with an enormous office—with his father in the Administration building at the four-mile-square research and development facility.

“Sure did, Trent. They should have left the ground about ten minutes ago. Bon voyage to them. What serious business stuff do I need to attend to before I can go play?”

Munford Trent had worked for Tom and his father for a

decade and was the stake that held the office together. He knew that when Tom mentioned ‘play,’ the nineteen-year-old actually meant that he wanted to get to his private laboratory and invent something.

“Of the eighty-seven pieces of mail that arrived just before quitting time yesterday, exactly eighty-two of them have been handled. The usual, ‘Please give us money,’ and ‘I’ve invented better sliced bread’ letters. Standard replies. Then, of the five remaining two are incredible offers for credit cards—” he looked over his newly-acquired reading glasses and rolled his eyes, “and these three need you to read them and decide if you want to pursue them. You should be able to get down to your lab in under ten minutes if you read quickly.” He smiled at Tom who thanked him.

Sitting down at his desk, Tom perused the first letter. It was an invitation to speak at the Rotary Club lunch three weeks hence in Oswego. They were asking for fifty minutes—with slides preferred—on what they termed ‘Inventing The American Dream.’ Having no idea what that meant, and since Damon Swift had addressed them just a month earlier, Tom scribbled *Project Deadline, Apologies* on it and turned to the second letter.

Handwritten, this also turned out to be a request for one of the Swifts to address a gathering, but this came from a ladies group calling themselves *Women With Agendas*. He gritted his teeth as he imagined what sort of *agendas* they might have. He was about to consider accepting their invitation/order of appearance when the final sentence caught his eye:

*While we normally eschew the stubborn male viewpoint, it has been pointed out that we must adhere to state laws and not confine ourselves to just open thinkers. Your reply is expected by Friday. Thank you.*

This one he notated identically to the first.

He was about to similarly mark the final one when some of its words caught his attention:

Dear Mr. Thomas Swift,

It has come to my attention in the form of an article I discovered this very morning, one written by a noted archeologist in your area, that bones have been found of a nature such to elicit imaginations of dinosaurs and plesiosaurs having roamed, wandered and swum in the vicinity of, and indeed in, the lake you locally know as Carlopa.

My Scottish grandfather would call it Loch Carlopa, and I hope to convince your local government to make that very change should my surmise prove to be true.

Having said all of that, allow me to introduce myself. I am Drew Nance. In certain circles I am known as what is commonly termed a “sleuth.” I see myself more as an amateur mystery tactician, but as my friend and business companion is constantly telling me, I need to lighten up and understand that most people merely find me to be an inquisitive snoop.

I would like to invite you to join me for dinner on the evening of June 10th. As I am new to your fair burgh I would ask that you locate and secure a suitable place where we

might discuss a matter of both archeological significance as well as one of extreme socio/scientific import.

Please call the number below. My thanks to you and hope that you will find this to be an adventure in which you are willing to participate.

Tom sat back and thought. It came to him that he actually recognized the name of the person sending him this letter. And, while it seemed every so slightly crack-pot, he had to admit to Bud as they had dinner at Tom's house that evening that he was thinking of looking into it.

Bud looked over and asked, "Why aren't you telling this to Bashalli? Not that I don't appreciate being with my best friend, it's just that I mean, why are we having dinner and not the two of you lovebirds?"

"Bash and her family are visiting a relative—she said he was some sort of uncle but not from Pakistan, and just suffered a stroke—out in Los Angeles for at least a week. With Mom, Dad and Sandy in San Francisco, and neither of us with much else to do for several foreseeable evenings I figured it must be a pizza with Bud night."

Bud had been picking at his food and suddenly seemed to be in pain. When Tom asked, he replied, "Just a little indigestion. Chow made me what he called a Texas Tornado Burger for lunch. I don't think it's sitting very well right now." He suddenly jumped up and rushed to the small bathroom just off the kitchen.

Tom could hear him retching. He went to the door and knocked lightly. "Are you okay, Bud? Could you have some sort of food poisoning?"

Bud gagged several times and then blew his nose. The toilet flushed, twice, and Bud emerged looking pale and very tired.

"If it was, then Chow should be down like me. Call him," Bud insisted, slowly walking to the kitchen table and sitting down.

Tom made the call to the roly-poly Texan's cell phone. When Chow answered Tom asked if he was having any symptoms. Chow replied that he was feeling 'fit as a fiddle and ready to have night on the town.' Tom wished him a happy evening and hung up.

"You look like something the cat dragged in... three days ago, flyboy. I'm taking you to the hospital." He helped his friend get up and out to the car. They pulled into a parking space just fifteen feet away from the door to the Shopton General Hospital emergency room. Tom ran in and brought out a wheelchair.

After checking Bud in and following him to one of the exam cubicles, Tom was growing more and more concerned. Bud had gone from pale to almost a gray-yellow in under an hour.

The attending physician asked Bud several questions and then poked and prodded Bud's abdomen. "Are you his brother?" he asked Tom.

"Pretty much. What's going on with him?"

"Appendicitis. Pretty advanced. He must have been suffering for a couple days. I'll make a quick call and then we need to get him upstairs to the operating room. I'll

want to have him starting on sedation, so stand by. You can sign the surgical release.”

Tom waited for three hours while his best friend had his highly inflamed appendix removed. When the doctor related how the operation went, he told Tom, “I hope he’s not got any of the nasty blood infections like hepatitis or HIV. We barely got that appendix out of his body before it quite literally exploded. Right in my face.”

Tom assured him that Bud completed a rigorous flight exam just a month before. “Doc Simpson is very thorough,” Tom told the physician.

“Greg Simpson? Out at Enterprises? I thought he only worked on the bigwigs over there. I mean, a couple kids like you two...” He trailed off as Tom took out his Enterprises ID card.

“Oh, good grief!” the doctor exclaimed. “I should have recognized you. I had the pleasure of patching you up awhile back when some giant piece of machinery fell on you. Leg, wasn’t it?”

“And abdomen and arm,” Tom said with a rueful grin.

Because of Bud’s condition he would be remaining in the hospital at least four days and possibly more. Tom decided to let him sleep off the anesthesia and return the next morning.

Sitting at home an hour later Tom picked up the strange letter he had planned to show Bud. Rereading it, he glanced at the calendar on the wall. It was already the 8th of the month. He would need to make up his mind and

make a reservation the following morning. He realized that just *thinking* that he would need to make a reservation pretty much summed things up. He was going to meet with Drew Nance and, presumably, his unnamed cohort.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Welcome to this delightful restaurant, Tom Swift,” the tall, almost willowy blond-haired man rose to shake Tom’s hand as the inventor arrived at the table. “I am, as you may well surmise, Drew Nance. And this,” he swept his arm out to indicate the shorter and slightly pudgy yet athletic-looking man to his left, “is Carl Keene. Assistant.. Confidant. Crackerjack researcher. All around great guy and friend.”

Tom shook Keene’s offered hand. “Nice to meet you both,” he said, sitting down. “I thought that I’d get here a few minutes early and be able to greet you both, not the other way around.”

“If I weren’t his eyes on the clock, Drew would be perpetually late by ten minutes,” Carl Keene said. “I aim for five minutes early.”

Smiling and nodding, Nance said, “I am convinced that I was born in a slightly different time plane. Ten minutes to the left of this one. What Carl says is absolutely the truth. Now then, after we order our meals, and I insist on paying for this evening’s repast, we shall get down to speaking of our reason for being here in Shopton.”

After the waiter took their orders, Nance leaned forward and steepled his fingers together on the table.

“You will have read your own city newspaper, I’m certain, and spotted the article regarding the discovery of a cache of bones next to your local Yacht Club. I believe it stated that dredging had just begun on an extension to that facility. Am I right?”

Tom nodded.

“Well then. I am here to tell you that those fossils are of great importance and absolutely not the reason why I am here before you—even if it was off by my standard ten minutes.” He smiled, waiting for Tom to get his little joke. When the inventor did not react, Nance continued. “And, so to the reason for my appearance here. Your rather imposing lake, Carlopa by name, is rumored to hold a more recent secret. One that my dear Grandfather would have given his eye teeth, if he still had any teeth that is, to be in on.”

Tom was getting a little bothered by the way the man spoke. He seemed to use a great number of words without saying anything of substance. “Can you please get to the point?” Tom asked trying to move the conversation along.

“Ah, Certainly. Here it is. Running down the very center of Carlopa is a trench; it runs more than thirty miles of the lake and ranges from fifty to one hundred feet wide and reaches down as far as five hundred feet!”

“Pretty much everybody who lives here knows that, Mr. Nance. Why is it of interest to you?”

“Because, my young Mr. Swift. It is what resides deep down in that trench. You see... no. You tell him, Keene.”

Tom swiveled around to face the other man. “Yes, Mr. Keene. Please tell me.” Tom was trying to keep a pleasant look on his face, but he was having some difficulty.

“The trench is rumored to contain one of three North American, fresh water *Cryptoclidus*. A member of the plesiosaurus family first categorized in eighteen seventy-one by a gentleman named Phillips. It is—”

“It is,” interrupted Nance, “a direct cousin of the most beloved of plesiosaurs, Nessie, the *Loch Ness Monster*.”

**PART 2****Here, Carlie, Carlie!**

IT REQUIRED another five minutes of conversation before Tom could say anything without laughing. When he finally commented on their story, one that had begun with the declaration of a living, breathing monster under the calm waters of the lake and had progressed on to claims that locals were keeping the existence of the monster secret for fear of hurting tourist trade, Tom was about to burst.

“Do you two mean to sit there and tell me that you believe that you might have any bit of proof, and that you can conceive of a world in which such a thing is true? Do you?” He looked back and forth between them.

Nance was sitting back with his arms crossed over his chest nodding in satisfaction.

Keene was sitting looking a bit uncomfortable, but Tom could tell the man was fully supportive of his strange friend. “You have your very own Nessie!” he proclaimed.

Nance sat forward quickly and placed both hands on the table. As my dear grandfather would say, ‘Nay to ya, laddie. What ya hae is nay Nessie. What ya got is bound ta be Carlie.’ He gave Tom a big smile. “Like the accent?”

Tom shook his head. “Mr. Nance. I’m beginning to think that I like only one thing about this. You are a character and your companion is as well. That notwithstanding, you’ll have to come forward with real

evidence in order for me to believe in your rather outlandish claims. Can you understand why I am more than skeptical?”

“Well, of course I can. Nessie, and your own Carlie, are elusive to be sure. You can’t disbelieve that this area was once rife with dinosaurs, though. Not with the recent find. My belief is that the few bones they found in their first dig will prove to be smaller than the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There will be, and you can mark both my words and your calendars, a date in the very near future when the full extent of this find will be laid open.”

Tom wasn’t certain if he was getting a little annoyed, or if he was actually enjoying this tall tale. He asked, “What evidence do you have?”

“In my thirty-six years on this Earth I have traveled to many nations. I have come upon mysteries and even a few crimes that have, as they say, piqued my interest. When such a circumstance occurs, Carl and I begin performing extensive and meticulous research. Well, when I say ‘we’ I mean Carl distills massive amount of information down into the salient pieces and I go through them with microscopic attention.”

“Drew discovered the ability to take a lot of disassociated information in and to pull out the most probable solution,” Carl Keene stated. “He can sit down in front of a television mystery program and tell you who did the crime and even what sort of twists might be expected and all in the first ten minutes.”

“More a parlor trick than anything else, but what good Carl says is true. In my teen years I found that my brain is



able to hold onto an enormous amount of useful, and even more so, useless facts. Then, when faced with something such as a mysterious murder of someone who wasted away over a period of five weeks, had pale, bluish tones to their skin, vomited extensively, and so forth, I seem to easily recognize that they were suffering from heavy metal poisoning, most probably a combination of arsenic and selenium.”

Tom pursed his lips and rubbed his jaw. Although he never was so public about it, he had the same ability when it came to scientific matters. It was one of the ‘secrets’ of his success.

“Alright,” he told the two men. “Cards on the table, please or I will need to leave. Do you have any actual proof of this *Cryptoclidus*? Anything that can be proven?”

Nance and Keene looked at one another and then back at Tom. Nance spoke for them both. “In absolute truth we can offer neither empirical proof nor substantive data. What I can offer you is my assurance that I believe, most strongly, that there is something down there. Over a great many years there have simply been too many and far too similar descriptions of something being out in the lake. Something that I need your help in finding.” He sat back once again, this time looking pensive.

Their meals came to the table and they ate in silence for more than ten minutes while Tom thought about what had been said. He placed his fork back on the plate and cleared his throat.

“Okay. Logically, and from what the experts say, we do have what appears to be a cache, or graveyard, of bones

from at least two different species of dinosaur in our lake. Heck. For all we know the entire town might be built on a vast dino gravesite. I have seen some evidence in South America and on the African continent of reptilian beasts of the sort that are not found anywhere else and that exhibit characteristics of dinosaurs. And, while I believe that the whole Loch Ness Monster fable is just that, I can offer no empirical proof of my own that it does not exist.” He took a deep breath through his nose and let it out slowly before continuing. “I find that I have a couple weeks with not much to fill my time. My family is away. My girlfriend and her family are away. My best friend is laid up in the hospital for at least another three days and after that he’ll be limited to what he can do for a few weeks. So, even if I do not believe in what you say, what is it you would like me to assist you with?”

Carl Keene was so excited that he reached his hand out, probably to shake Tom’s, and managed to knock over both of their water glasses.

“Oh, I am so sorry, Tom. I’m rather clumsy. Forgive me,” he said as he attempted to control the water that threatened to flow over the edge of the table and into Tom’s lap. His actions caused the water to reverse directions and pour over the edge of the table and into his own lap.

“Carl is prone to knocking things about, including himself on occasion, but I dare say that you are in for a much wetter experience in the coming days.”

*This, the inventor thought, ought to be good for a few laughs while Bud's out of commission.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning Tom explained his encounter with Nance and Keene to his head of Security. After Harlan Ames did a security check on the two men, Tom felt a bit more at ease.

“Nance and Keene are what they say: amateur sleuths. Fairly successful, especially in the ‘mystery of the haunted whatever’ cases. They have not been involved in anything illegal or even mildly so, unless you count a little breaking and entering charge in Chicago a few years ago. They were involved in helping a small local police department solve a murder and evidently did not wish to wait to apprehend the prime suspect. They smashed a side window and opened his front door. The record says that Mr. Keene was found sitting on the chest of the suspect while your Mr. Nance was reciting everything the man had done wrong that led to them figuring out he was the culprit.”

“He does like to talk,” Tom said with a smile. “So, if they want me to accompany them on, say, a diving trip in the middle of Lake Carlopa, you’re fairly certain of my safety?”

“Diving? Hardly. It says here,” Harlan looked back at his screen, “that your Drew Nance is a hydrophobe. Scared witless of water. He almost drowned ten years ago up in Maine while trying to debunk what the locals called ‘a pack of hounds from Hades.’ Fell out of a small boat and got tangled in something. Had to be pulled out by... oh, it says that Mr. Keene saved him when .”

*And that, Tom thought, probably explains the friendship.* “Okay. I’ll keep you informed about what we

are doing, but it looks like I’m going Nessie hunting!”

Nance and Keene arrived at the main gate just before noon. Tom had them escorted to the large office where they had a light lunch prepared by Chow Winkler. The former Texas ranch cook, now chef for Enterprises, served them braised chicken thighs with figs, olives and capers.

After taking his first bite, Keene declared it to be a marvelous combination and asked for the recipe. Chow obliged by brining him a photocopy of his recipe card.

“I feel that I need to confess something about me,” Drew said. “It is about me and water.”

“If you’re referring to your little mishap in Maine, then I know about it,” Tom said.

Nance appeared to be shocked that Tom knew of the incident.

“You are not the only one who is capable of doing research, Drew,” Carl reminded him. “It looks like you’ve met your match with Tom here.” He smiled at Tom.

“Now that we have that in the open, I am hoping that you have some sort of miniature submarine that we can use. I may need to be tranquilized so that I do not panic, but I am determined to accompany you and Carl to the very bottom of the deepest part of Loch Carlopa.”

Tom told them both about his triphibian atomicars. Able to travel in the air, over water and even submerged, these vehicles were in use in eighteen countries around the world. Three of them were permanently available at Enterprises.

For more than three hours they brainstormed about what would need to be taken down with them. It was quickly decided that any thought of capturing something was out of the question. That left getting good photographic or even some physical evidence.

Tom gave them a basic description of his aqualamps. Normally used on his deep sea craft, these alternate wavelength lights and the associated electronics and filters that could utilize the light were able to provide almost daylight-quality brightness even in the total darkness of the deepest oceans.

“The atomicars already come outfitted with the lamps and several cameras.”

“Those will be a supreme help to us,” Nance declared. “What about weapons in case we are attacked?”

Tom shook his head and explained the Swift philosophy about weapons. “We just do not carry or use them. The nearest thing we have are our eGuns and they don’t operate under water. At least not unless you want to shock yourself into unconsciousness every time you pull the trigger.”

They walked across the tarmac to one of the smaller hangars to the north of the cluster of buildings in the middle of Enterprises. There, Tom had the newest of the atomicars pulled out.

“It’s so...” Carl began but seemed to be unable to find any more words.

“It most certainly is just that,” Drew exclaimed in a loud

whisper. “I dare say it is a whole lot more as well.”

At more than twenty feet in length, the ‘car’ looked like a combination of sleek automobile and futuristic jet aircraft. The totally clear TomaQuartz canopy extended from just above the driver’s instrument panel all the way to the very back of the vehicle. The wheels were mostly covered so that from a distance it almost looked like it was floating a few inches above the ground.

With a hint of pride, Tom explained, “This is the Model Three atomicar. The canopy is already treated with necessary coating and a microfilm overlay that lets you see what the built-in aqualamps illuminate all around you. Plus, it has five 3D cameras mounted around it—one for each side, front and rear cameras and a downward-facing one. If there is anything down there we can get it on video.”

Almost breathlessly, Carl asked, “Surely, you didn’t outfit this beautiful vehicle for our, uh, adventure in just the last day?”

Tom laughed. “No. Actually this is the prototype of the model that we will be selling to people who want to have submarine adventures down to about five hundred feet, on a budget. Instead of costing millions, these are well under a hundred thousand dollars. They are powered by a small energy pod and only need to be refueled every two years or so.”

“Uh, Tom?” began Drew hesitantly. “How soon before we might take this marvel into the water?”

The young inventor reached over and pressed a

recessed button on the side. The entire center of the canopy, that had appeared to be one solid piece, slid back. Tom motioned to the men to step in. "Let's go now!"

Drew Nance visibly blanched. Small beads of sweat began appearing on his forehead and his upper lip. He gathered his courage and gulped. "Could we just go out a few feet onto the surface? At least until I get my nerve?"

"Certainly, Mr. Nance. Hop in you two. Let's go to the lake."

Two minutes later the atomicar rolled down the tarmac and onto a short runway. Although it could take off and land vertically, Tom believed that it was more dramatic to do both maneuvers using a short roll of about four hundred feet.

The atomicar was soon flying through the air a couple hundred feet above the treetops.

Carl asked, "Don't you have to radio the tower for permission?"

"No. Or, only when we are going to exceed three hundred feet or go within two miles of an airfield. We will be doing neither. Look," he said pointing to their right. "You can just see Lake Carlopa from here."

The azure water was sparkling in the mid day sun. Shopton, and Swift Enterprises, was located on the western side of the forty-mile long lake and about three miles from the upper west corner. At its widest it was about two miles across, and there was a small island almost directly across from the Shopton Yacht Club, a

favorite with local teens.

Minutes later Tom brought the atomicar to a halt near an old boat ramp a mile south of town. "This is an old family property," he told them. "The man for whom I am named was born just a few hundred feet inland and lived there until he got married. I figured this was moderately secluded and a good place to go into the water as any."

He glanced at Drew Nance who sat there, rigid and staring straight ahead. "If this is going to bother you too much, Mr. Nance, I would be happy to just take Carl with me on this first expedition."

Nance shook his head as if just waking from a bad dream. Sucking in a breath through clenched teeth, he told Tom, "There is no way I am going to miss this. I came here to find your Nessie... I mean your *Carl*, and if it means putting aside a personal demon, then so be it!"

Tom glanced in the mirror at Carl who was sitting directly behind Drew. Carl's eyes were twinkling and he caught Tom's eyes. He nodded. "Here we come, Carl," he said. "Be a good girl and come out, come out, wherever you are!"

**PART 3****Deeper and Deeper Still**

TOM TOOK one more look at Drew and then turned his attention to the atomicar controls.

“We will lift up a little and go out into the water. Perhaps just a few dozen yards from the shore. It is pretty shallow here until you get fifty feet out, then it begins to drop. In fact, anybody over about five feet can walk out the first forty feet and still keep their head above water.”

With one motion Tom lifted the atomicar three feet into the air. It moved slowly forward until it was out over the water. He decided it might be best to keep Nance’s side of the vehicle closest to the shore. It was a good strategy in that it appeared to give the man both a level of comfort as well as the opportunity to see how safe the atomicar was.

“We’re all sealed up,” Tom announced.

“Uh,” Drew began. “Might it be possible for me to step out?”

Tom began worrying that the man was about to run away, but he said, “Sure. I can open the canopy. Did you forget something?”

“No. I just believe that I need to stand in this water for a few moments. If I can just get my brain to accept that anything larger than a bathtub is still safe, I can overcome fear. I know it!”

Tom pressed the release and the canopy slid back. Nance stood up and turned to sit on the edge of the body.

He removed his shoes and socks and then, in one quick motion, spun on his backside and slipped off of the atomicar and into the water. It came to his waist.

“I just realized that I neglected to remove my trousers,” he said back over his shoulder. “I hope that you will allow me back in, wet and all, Tom.”

Tom and Carl laughed. “Absolutely. The upholstery is waterproof.”

“Carl, you should come experience this,” Drew told him. “It is actually quite warm in this shallow area. Quite warm and actually delightful. Oh, do come in, Carl,” he practically begged his friend.

With a shrug, Carl took off his shoes, socks and pants. “As long as there are no ladies about, I guess my Y-fronts will do,” he said. He moved over to the side of the atomicar and tried to emulate the movements of his friend. However, instead of smoothly spinning and slipping into the water, Carl lost his balance and tumbled backwards and into the water. He splashed about for a few seconds and then stood up, sputtering.

Drew, who had still been looking a bit nervous, began laughing. He cupped his hand and sent a spray of water right at Carl. In a few seconds they were splashing each other like small children, laughing and having a good time. A minute later they slowed down and then stopped.

“Oh, my,” Drew said wiping water from his face, “that was quite fun. Refreshing and a lot of fun. Thank you, Carl, for that.” To Tom he said, “I do believe that I might be over my fear of this marvelous water. Time will tell, but I have to admit that I am feeling wonderful right now.”

The two men helped each other back into the atomicar. Tom asked Carl to pull a couple towels out of the storage compartment under the third row of seats. As the two dried themselves and their seats and floor a bit, Tom slid the canopy closed and started driving the atomicar farther out into the water.

At one hundred feet out, Tom let the vehicle slip under the surface.

Lake Carlopa was, after the spring runoff, a very clear lake. With just the aid of sunlight they could see hundreds of feet all around them. Soon, they were at the middle of the lake and Tom turned them to the south. They dropped down to about ninety feet and moved along at just four knots.

“Tell me as much as you can about your research, Drew,” Tom said using the man’s first name for the very first time.

“Thank you, by the way. I was about to ask you to stop calling me Mr. Nance. Anyway, as soon as I read about the discovery last month I began... Carl and I began our research on North American dinosaurs. Where they apparently lived and in what concentrations. Like several other areas, this was once a vast swampy area and that is precisely the sort of place many of the old reptilians preferred.”

“Drew concluded that, and this was based on other major finds around the world, that there might be as many as thirty different medium and large types and many dozens of the smaller types that could have called this area home,” Carl stated.

“That’s right. Within a week or so all the information about major finds like the ones in Utah and Oregon, down in Argentina and even in what is now the Sahara Desert started to come together. Underlying geology, proximity to warm springs of water, even the minute residual salinity of the soils. It all comes together in a thirty mile area, and Shopton is on the northwest corner of it all.”

“Drew is certain that what is now Lake Carlopa was once the center of it all.”

“That’s right,” Nance said looking straight ahead, “and so I thought— *good God! What’s that?*”

Tom slammed his hand onto the control panel stopping their forward motion. He had seen it too.

Seemingly floating right in front of them, like the flukes of a whale’s tail, was a large object. Tom turned on the aqualamps to get a better look at it.

“Well, I’ll be,” he muttered.

They all looked at the object that seemed to go down right to the bottom, more that eighty feet below. Tom maneuvered the atomicar to the left and around their find. When they were facing the opposite side, he let out a little laugh.

“I didn’t know we had any of those in the lake,” he said.

In front of them was the partially bare tail end of a large aircraft. It was obvious to them that the plane had crash landed in the lake at some time and settled with its nose down in the lake bed and its tail sticking straight up. They descended until they could see the wings—one half had been torn off and sat sixty feet down the sloping bottom—and the engine configuration.

“That’s an old B-17,” Carl told them. “I use to be somewhat of a World War Two aircraft buff. If we can get around to the side I can probably even tell you what model this is.”

Tom let the atomicar slide around and up a few feet.

“Well,” he said as he saw the crumbling side, “there’s too much missing. Since we can’t see the nose, I’d have to make a guess that this is possibly a G series. It looks like a few extra gun mounts were there on the framework at one time. I wonder how it ended up here?”

Tom said, “There were several air bases in the area during the war. I’d guess that this was a training plane that ran into trouble. Two others were pulled out of the shallower water at the north end back in the late forties from what I understand. This must have been overlooked, or just too deep for them to try to pull out.”

They went back to the surface and Tom took a GPS location of the wreck. He would contact the Air Force and tell them about the missing bomber at a later date.

They returned to a depth just above the very visible trench that ran the length of the lake. Tom remarked that it almost looked like a rift left behind by an earthquake. “See how it appears to be more of a tear than a formation made by, oh, water or even a glacier?”

“When will we go into the trench, Tom?” Drew asked.

“I’d like to just go the length of the lake at this depth today. We can come back tomorrow and begin going deeper.” As they agreed, Tom increased their speed to about seven knots. They were already sixteen miles down the lake, so they would finish their run in a little over

three hours.

The trip was uneventful, and they went back to the surface and lifted into the air. Thirty minutes later Tom lightly set the atomicar down on the short runway back at Enterprises and taxied to the hangar.

Carl said, “If you can give me a copy of the video from the B-17, I can research it tonight. I might even be able to tell the Government exactly what plane she was. There’s a lot of info out on the Internet these days.”

Tom pulled a solid-state memory card from his shirt pocket. He had developed the card when modern ‘thumb’ drives and small camera-style memory cards had reached a limit. This solid-state card was less than two inches wide and two-and-a-half long, was just a few millimeters thick but could hold a terabyte of digital information.

He slipped it into a slot on the dash, keyed in his request on the control panel and soon had it back in his pocket, the entire seven hours of video transferred to it. In the office he inserted it into his computer and transferred the contents, then handed the card along with a small video player to Carl Keene.

Tom needed to take the next day away from the search to work with his propulsion engineers on a new, ultra-light and miniature jet engine they were developing. They had run into a problem with quality control on the tiny set of turbine blades and Tom’s previous experience was in desperate need.

That evening he visited Bud in the hospital. After filling his friend in on the initial search, their discussion turned to what might happen if they did find something.

“I’m just about absolutely certain we’ll find nothing—at least nothing more than the possibility of more dinosaur bones—down anywhere in the lake,” he told Bud.

“I’d love to be out of here and going with you. This Nance sounds like the sort of screwy character you only see in the movies or read about in those quirky British mysteries. Does he wear a funny hat and smoke a pipe?”

Tom chose to ignore this. “When do you get out?”

“The warden assures me that it will be tomorrow. Or, the day after. I’m supposed to be up and walking around more than I am, but they never stitched me up. They say they’ve got some sort of wad of gauze in there and need to have the end sticking out to drain away any infection. So, every time I try to move around, including their precious walking, the incision hurts to high heaven.”

Tom tsk’d at his friend. “Come on. Let’s get you on your feet. Your guts won’t spill out if you hold a pillow over the place. I’ll help you get started and then I’ve got to head home. Bash is supposed to call in about an hour.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want you to miss that,” Bud said with a hint of a smile. “I spoke to Sandy twice this afternoon. She wants to fly home immediately, but I told her I’m fine and that Doctor Swift is going to see me through this.”

Tom assisted Bud in getting to his feet. With the flyer holding onto his portable drip stand, they moved out of the room and into the hall.

“Nice to have you up and about,” a nurse told him as the two teens walked past the nurse’s station. “The doctor wants you to be up for at least thirty minutes. I’ll go lock your door if you come back in anything less. Hear?”

Bud gave her a lopsided grin. “Next you’ll probably threaten me with a shower of boiling oil if I try to go break into the room.”

She nodded and then went back to her paperwork.

Tom left Bud’s side a half hour later. They had wandered all over the second floor where Bud’s room was, and then along the corridors of the third floor where the Intensive Care Unit and the operating rooms were.

As Tom bade him goodbye, Bud remarked, “I’m going up to the Maternity Ward. Maybe I can brighten the day of some women who are in labor. You know, help them laugh and push the baby out?”

Tom made it home in plenty of time to get Bashalli’s call. They spoke for more than an hour before she had to excuse herself. “Father is insisting that we go to a local Pakistani restaurant. As if I don’t eat enough Pakistani food as it is. I think he is hoping there will be some amazing Pakistani man there who will sweep me off my feet.” She sounded discouraged about the prospect.

They hung up moments later and Tom decided to do a bit more research regarding dinosaurs in the area. What he found astounded him. As far back as the nineteen thirties the area had been known to have several locations where bones had been found. No complete skeletons had been recovered to date, but the fact that the huge beasts had indeed lived in the area gave some credence to Nance’s story.

“This might actually lead to something,” he said aloud.



**PART 4****What It Was, Was...**

THE THREE men took a deep dive on Saturday morning, but it was cut short when Nance became slightly agitated at the sight of the trench walls closing around them.

“I wish that I could shake this terrible feeling I’m getting,” he said after apologizing for the foreshortened exploration. “Carl will tell you that I am normally unperturbed by anything.”

Tom looked in the rear view mirror in time to see Carl rolling his eyes. When he saw Tom staring at him, he turned red, but then smiled. “He is scared silly of lobsters,” he told Tom. “We can’t walk into a restaurant past a tank of them without my having to lead him like a blind man as he shuts his eyes.”

“Enough!” declared Nance. “It so happens that I was severely bitten by one—”

“Clawed, to be precise.” Carl broke in.

“Fine. I had an experience as a small child when one of those ocean-going cockroaches almost took my leg off.” He harrumphed as if that ended the discussion.

“His father told me that he found it in a tidal pool and purposely stuck his toe—”

“Please, Carl. Enough? Please?” To Tom he said, “I am feeling better now. Perhaps we can explore a bit more.”

“No. I think we need to take a different approach,” Tom

told them. “There is a forest of moss and other underwater plant life along with the remains of old houses, logging debris and who know what else down there. Anything smaller than a killer whale might find many places to hide.”

“What are you suggesting, Tom?”

“Well, Drew, we need to bring down something that can detect biologic life. Not plant life. Animal life. I have an idea, but it is going to take a few days to bring it all together. I would be happy to lend you a pair of our deep diving suits if you’d like to do some checking on your own, or you can go do some more research while I work on a new detector.”

It was decided that Carl and Drew would *not* borrow the offered aquasuits; Drew’s look of horror at the suggestion provided the definitive answer to that question. So, the two headed off to Boston where Carl preferred to do much of his research.

Tom returned to his lab in the underground hangar of the *Sky Queen* first thing Monday morning. He was just getting into designing an audio input sensor when a small knock came at the door.

“Bud!” Tom exclaimed, happily as his visitor came in. “You’re out. You’re back. I thought that you were suppose to be in bed, though.” he gave his friend a worried look.

Bud’s grin told him all he needed to know. Like Tom, the flyer and athlete was in very good condition. Both of them healed quickly. That, when added to a natural, built-in restlessness, made it difficult to keep either of them down for very long.

“The doctor gave me a pardon Saturday morning and made me promise that I’d spend three days recovering at home. Since he didn’t specify which three days, I figured that I’d make them Saturday, Sunday and tomorrow. So, what’s on the agenda?”

Tom told him all about the submerged trips, including the discover of an old B-17.

“Oh,” Bud said casually. “That’s the old G-twelve-five-five-two. She was one of the seventeens they brought back from Europe to use as cargo planes. She got hit by lightning near Thessaly in, ummmm, forty-nine I think. Lost power in three engines. The crew of three bailed out north of town and the plane flew along the lake at about fifty feet until it went in. I thought everyone knew about it.”

“I sure didn’t,” Tom said. “If dad knew he’s never told me anything about it. Oh, well. If Carl and Drew don’t find out anything at least you can tell them what you know. Anyway, what I’m working on is a Loch Ness Monster detector. If something is alive and down there, I intend to find it by listening for its heart. I’m building the receiver now and it will be connected to one of the Li’l Idiot computers that I’ll program to look for repetitive sounds in the bandwidth that all known hearts beat.” He looked at Bud and then asked, “Did you know about this monster thing?”

Bud gave a slight nod. “I heard about it when I first moved here. A couple of the guys at the high school were trying to scare a freshman. Told him it came out of the depths to claim its victims and liked the flesh of anyone under sixteen. I thought it was a load so I just sort of

forgot about it.”

“I need to make a call. Wait around.” Tom picked up the receiver and dialed his father’s cell phone. When it answered he inquired about how the trip was going, and then got down to the point of the call. “Dad? Have you ever heard about some sort of monster that’s supposed to be in Lake Carlopa?”

Even Bud could hear the hearty laughter coming over the phone.

“Why, of course, Son. About every twenty years or so it rears its head. And, before you ask I mean the rumor, not some monstrous creature. Your grandfather and I spent several rather cold nights back when I was about eight or nine sitting on the bank and looking for it. Most of the rumors say it appears at the south end of the lake. Gosh. I hadn’t heard that old tale for, must be twenty-five years now. Guess it’s about overdue to come out.”

Tom said goodbye and turned to Bud. “Does everybody know about things like this monster and the old B-17 but me?”

Bud smiled at his friend. “Face it, skipper. You tend to have your nose buried in tech manuals, schematics and CAD programs. You don’t really pay much attention to the world around you. Except, of course, when Bashalli is around.”

Bud stuck around for another hour helping where he could. By the time he said he was going home to rest, he and Tom had finished the two circuit boards that would ‘digest’ any incoming audio signals and send the results to the computer. Tom phoned over to Arv Hanson,

Enterprises chief model maker and the man responsible for building scale test and display versions of Tom's inventions. "Got a three-part case design to send you. Can you pump them out using your 3D printers?"

Arv agreed to get onto them as soon as he downloaded Tom's design files. "Clear or opaque?"

"They can be opaque, Arv. Oh, and I need them to be watertight down to at least five hundred feet."

"Have them for you by nine tomorrow morning," the man promised.

When Tom arrived at eight fifteen, the three case pieces plus a silicone gasket were waiting on his workbench. He assembled the device and then filled the lower chamber with several pounds of lead shot. It was needed to keep the listening device from bobbing back to the surface. A quick test in his small water tank showed that it had just enough negative buoyancy to work like he intended.

It would dangle below and trail slightly behind the submerged atomicar on a twenty foot black rubber tether.

Once he had it connected to the computer he returned it to the water tank and made a series of tests using various recorded underwater sounds. His program, designed to learn from what it was 'hearing,' soon began identifying heartbeats seven times out of ten. With some additional tweaking it was almost perfect by the end of the work day.

Drew and Carl called him that evening. "We're back, and we've discovered a few things. Can we go back out tomorrow?"

Tom asked them to meet him at Enterprises at nine. Then, he called Bud.

"Hey, flyboy. Are you up to sitting in the atomicar and steering while I operated the computer?" He could practically hear Bud's grin when the answer came back in the affirmative. "I'll pick you up at eight!"

The four men flew to the lake and were standing on the shore before nine-thirty.

"I did some additional poking around and found out that the sightings, the last major sightings, that is," Carl told them, "were more than just a few years ago."

"Twenty-five," Tom guessed.

"Uhhh, well, actually, yes. How did you know that?"

"I spoke with my father and he said he hadn't heard any rumblings about the monster for about that long. He also said that most of the supposed sightings were in the southern part of the lake, down near an old resort and campground."

There was silence from the two in front of him for more than half a minute. Finally, Drew spoke. "Did we just waste three days in Boston finding out things your father could have told us if we just waltzed into his office?"

"He's out of town and I hadn't brought up the subject until I called him the other evening," Tom said, sensing the disappointment of the two men.

Bud didn't help matters when he asked, "Did you find out anything about the B-17 G-twelve-five-five-two?"

Carl let out a groan of exasperation. "I spent nine solid hours searching for that information. Is this another of Tom's father's bits of information?"

Out of the corner of his eye Tom could see Bud

struggling to not smile. Finally, the flyer replied, “Actually that’s something that I told the skipper about. Most people who fly up here know the story. Sorry, but I could have saved you that trouble if I hadn’t been holed up in the hospital.”

To take everyone’s minds off of the turn of events, Tom suggested, “Let’s get the sensor rigged. It’s on the rear seat.” With Carl’s assistance he removed it and it’s tether and worked to attach it to a data input port on the back end of the atomicar.

Bud asked, “You know what that’s going to look like, dangling down on that tube, don’t you?”

Tom looked at the sensor for a few moments before he saw it. He laughed.

“What is it?” demanded Drew. “Is it something obscene or like that?”

“No,” Tom said as he stopped chuckling. “It is going to look like what it is. A giant stethoscope. We’re managed to turn an atomicar into a stethoscope.”

As soon as the realization set in., all four men had a good laugh.

“Let’s hope it works as well,” Carl commented.

They lifted off and flew slowly toward the southern end of the lake. About five miles before the end Tom lowered the atomicar to the water and soon had it heading for the depths.

He and Bud switched places so that Tom could attend to the computer. They could all hear an enormous amount of noise coming through the speakers at first. Tom

donned headphones and turned the speakers off for a few minutes. He adjusted various settings and—one by one—began blocking out the noises. Noises from jet skies, power boats, even water pumps for some of the homes built near the water’s edge were systematically dismissed.

A few minutes later Tom removed the headphones and turned the speakers back on. What they could hear was like a cacophonous symphony of drum-like beats.

“Those are thousands of hearts beating from all of the fish within about five hundred yards of us. I had to block out anything farther away.”

As they slowly descended into the trench Tom advised Bud to keep at least one hundred feet from the bottom. “We’ll still be able to hear anything down here,” he told them.

Three hours went past and they were getting near to the end of the trench. With just another two thousand feet to go before it would suddenly rise to the normal lake floor, Tom reached out and placed a hand on Bud’s arm. “Stop,” he directed.

The atomicar came to a lazy halt. Nobody was breathing as they listened to the change in the beats. Where most of the fish down here with them had heart rates in excess of one hundred beats, a new, slower beat was heard.

Tom made a new adjustment and the sounds of small, fast-beating hearts disappeared to be replaced by a single, deep thumping.

“Forty-three beats per minute,” Tom told them after the computer had taken a reading. “It registers like a large heart in a whale,” he added.

“That’s it!” Drew Nance whispered. “That’s Carlie! Can we get closer?”

“I’m still trying to figure out where it is coming from. I didn’t have the time to build in a sensitive direction finder. All I can tell you right now is that it is either in front of us or slightly below us. Bud... very slowly swing us about fifty degrees to port and then back to this heading, then do the same to starboard.”

After completing the maneuver, Tom told them in a low whisper, “It seems to be coming from below us and to the left side of the trench. Take us down another hundred feet and then point us to the left.”

As they achieved the new position, the heartbeat became stronger. It now seemed to be coming from almost dead ahead, in a lush pocket of underwater plants.

“What do we do now, Tom?” Bud asked.

“Closer. We must be closer,” Nance insisted.

Tom turned around. “And, if it is a plesiosaurus, perhaps fifty or more feet long, it might attack us. Would you care to swim for the surface if it does?”

In the light of the cabin he could see the man blanch at the thought. He turned back around and looked at the computer screen.

“Let’s slowly move another couple of hundred feet to the south,” he suggested. “Then, turn back this direction a bit.”

Bud complied.

“I’m going to risk spooking whatever it is by turning on the aqualamps. Hopefully, it won’t even notice them,

but...” he didn’t complete the sentence. He reached over and pressed a button. Suddenly, the area in front of the atomicar was brightly lit. Every detail of the barely-waving plants sprang out. The long-rotted stumps of trees could be seen sticking out from the crevasse sides. Below them a small boat wallowed on its side, a large hole in its bow. Farther to the right was what looked like the metal frame basket of a hot air balloon and its old burner units.

As the looked around, Bud gasped and pointed.

“Look!” he said just as something shot out of the underwater growth and raced under them. It had been at least twenty feet long, skinny and moved by quickly undulating its entire body.

“Was that some sort of fish?” Bud asked.

In a shaking voice, Drew solemnly said, “That was not fish!”

Tom had only caught the barest of glimpses of it; he had been concentrating on the computer screen. “Let me roll back the footage,” he suggested. “I’m sure that our camera’s caught whatever that was.”

“I told you so,” Drew Nance announced in a proud voice. “I said that there was a Nessie... a Carlie down here and I was correct!”

Tom found the point on the digital recording just a few seconds before the apparent monster lunged in their direction. He stepped the video ahead a few frames per second. With crystal clarity, the tip of the creature’s nose poked out from the plants followed by an exceptionally ugly face and then the long, slithering body.

“Well, my guess is that is your monster,” he said to the

group. “It’s certainly a nasty-looking thing and very, very large for it’s kind, but I’m fairly certain that it will prove to be—”

“Let me break the news to him, please,” Carl asked. Turning to his friend he said, “Drew. Way back at the beginning of all this I told you that I thought it might be one. Even your sainted grandfather told us he believe the Loch Ness Monster might be one. That,” he pointed at the freeze-frame of the ‘monster’, “is one giant example of an *Anguilla Rostrata*. A freshwater eel. I’m sorry. I know this meant a lot to you.”

With a slight chuckle, Drew shook his head. “Nothing to be sorry about, dear friend. As usual we had a wonderful adventure and you, along with our most gracious host, have cured me of my water phobia. All in all I would say this has been a very satisfactory expedition. I am satisfied that we have discovered the truth of the matter and I am cured!”

Bud, who had been informed about many of the little peccadilloes of Drew Nance asked with a slightly mean grin, “Okay. So now we can go get some lobster?”