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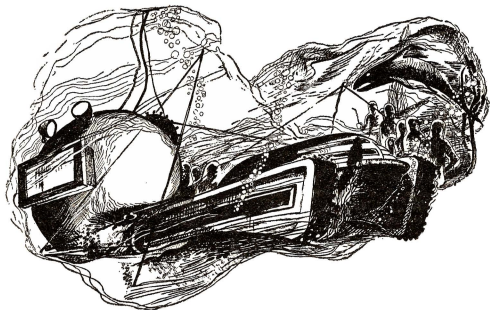
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ANDRYNE

by ARTHUR MACOM



“There’s a finger beckoning from another world, a voice I must answer, nor ask the reason why. I’m—I’m lost, Roswell! I’m never coming—”

I HAD always believed that Wilton Chase was a little crazy, and before we reached Haifa, off the Palestinian coast, I was sure of it.

For one thing, there was the war, which made expeditions such as ours an international problem. Who were we, anyway? We said we were Americans, scientists, but our little ship looked too much like a mine layer for the comfort of the British and the Turks, and probably—if they knew about it—for the Germans on Crete.

And then, it seemed ridiculous to come halfway across the world, lugging our unwieldy bathysphere equipment, for simple undersea explorations. There should have been plenty of sea in our part of the Atlantic and the Pacific, not to mention the Caribbean. Plenty for anyone except Wilton Chase.

“This is the place,” he said, putting his finger on a spot on the map just north of the Isle of Rhodes. “I want to dive here.”

"But, Wilton," I protested, "it's such a lot of unnecessary work. What did you do, shut your eyes and stab a pin?"

He shook his handsome, rather leonine head, raking back that great blond mane of his.

"Roswell," he said, "I don't think you're a scientist. You're a bookkeeper at heart. Oh, a bookkeeper of scientific things, perhaps, but there's no soul in you, no thirst for the unknown, no daring, no adventure—"

"You sound like a Rover boy," I scoffed.

And it was true. There was something in Wilton Chase which had not grown up. He was a man, all right—a brute of a man save for that infectious, good-natured smile of his—and one of our most versatile oceanographers. But always, whether in ichthyology or anthropology or any of a half-dozen lines, always he was a small boy reaching for the unattainable moon.

A little crazy, as I said. But I had got some inkling of his latest mania at Alexandria. Directly we touched port, Wilton was off to the famed Islamic university, with me, Dr. Emmet Roswell, tagging along and considering how foolish I must seem to be, pursuing this blond giant's whims.

An hour later Wilton Chase was still squatting, cross-legged, with an ancient scholar, one Abu Daoud, while I, knowing not one word of Arabic, amused myself by twiddling my thumbs. At last Wilton bade his wrinkled host an elaborate farewell, and we departed.

"Roswell," he said, "I'm positive now. My information seems authentic. We will find Andryne."

"And what in heaven's name is Andryne?" I asked.

He halted in the cloister. "You've never heard of Andryne, the great Chaldean outpost that was swallowed up— But why should I chafe you with legends of lost cities and their ghosts? You wouldn't

take my word for it, nor that of Herodotus nor Richard the Lion-Hearted, nor—"

"You're spanning quite a bit of history," I said, smiling.

Wilton tapped his fingers sharply upon my chest. "From history's dawn to now," he said. "And probably beyond. The history of ten thousand years to come, if we're lucky."

I should have laughed at him. Either he was slightly mad, or he thought me a fool. But somehow I did not.

WE sailed immediately. Off Haifa we hove to while a British destroyer's commander went through our papers painstakingly, incredulously, and then waved us on. We had passed Rhodes, bristling with its fortifications, and were moving toward the Turkish coast. It was near dusk when Wilton burst from his chart room.

"Drop anchor here," he called, and rushed across the desk and peered intently down into the purple waters slapping at our hull.

Fortunately it was still calm, although a breeze was coming up. We dropped a sea anchor, and by then Wilton was returning to the bridge.

"I'm going down," he said. "At once, Roswell. You're to stay above to superintend my descent. This is purely reconnaissance, of course. Tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow," I said sarcastically, "we can go home. You'll know by then how idiotic all this business is."

He ran his fingers through his tawny mane. "Never mind tomorrow. You stand by the telephone. Who knows, Roswell, I might—" He glanced quickly at me. —"see a ghost."

He was laughing, but there was an exhilaration in his voice that disturbed me. For after all, none of us except Wilton knew the reason for this cruise. A lost city, yes—but where had he got his data, what had determined that this tiny spot of

Mediterranean was our goal? Wilton's vaulting imagination, for all I knew. There were, of course, his charts, and I meant to have a look at them. But not until later, when his strange, nervous excitement should have passed. He must have read something of my thoughts.

"Oh, cheer up, Roswell," he said, patting my arm. "My worst encounter probably will be an octopus."

A very cheering thought, that one. But the bathysphere was ready. Wilton climbed into it, waved gayly to me, and closed the lid. We tested the air lines and the lift, tried a word or two on the telephone, and then his voice came to me hollowly.

"Lower away, Professor! Look out below, Andryne!"

I nodded to the bathysphere crew. The huge steel ball dipped below the surface just as the sun vanished behind the horizon. For a moment the sky toward the east gleamed with dark red, as if the blood of those dying upon the ageless desert sands in this latest of wars were reflected there. And then, almost at once, the night had come. The timeless mystery of the Mediterranean's darkness swallowed up our ship. It was depressing, terribly depressing. We seemed so futile there, probing into the past, while all around us, east, south, west and north, the present was unfolding horribly. Our world, our modern world—and we had made such an unbearable mess of it. I could not blame Wilton for fleeing from reality.

I shook my head, disgusted with myself. I too was growing just a little crazy. And I had work to do.

"Wilton," I said into the phone, "you'd better cut this short. We're going to have no moon tonight, and our position here is rather exposed."

I heard him laugh. "What about my position in this egg? I'm dropping into pitch. I've got the electric beams cut on, but so far I've been able to see only three

feet around me. Guess what's here?"

"All right," I said. "My guess is fish."

"Correct, Professor," Wilton said. "Fat ones. They're goggling at me."

"You're down two hundred feet," I said. "How about it? Had enough for tonight?"

"Is it tonight up there?" he asked. "That's funny, it's getting lighter down here. The beams are good for six or eight feet now. The water's cleaner, I suppose. Do you know how far we go to bottom, Roswell?"

"I'll have it checked," I said.

"No, don't bother. I know. Two thousand feet."

"You're down four hundred now."

"I can get bottom, Roswell. The bathysphere will take it."

"Not tonight," I said. "If you're going to be smashed, I want to hunt for souvenirs, and I'll need daylight for that."

THEN, over the telephone, I heard him working with some piece of apparatus in the bathysphere. I called without getting an answer. Finally he returned to the phone.

"What's my depth, Roswell?"

"Seven hundred feet," I said.

"You're going slow, aren't you?"

"Yes, Wilton, I don't want any accidents."

His voice, reverberating in the bathysphere, seemed forced, unnatural. "I'm getting some nice scenery down here," he said. "My beams are piercing twenty feet, crystal clear. Lots of life, some of it odd enough to photograph. There's a gentleman following me as I go down, seems to be mostly head, with his own private electric plant in his eyes. I think he's jealous of my candlepower."

"Or hungry," I said irritably. "See here, Wilton, you're practically half way. I think that's test enough. I'm going to haul you up."

He didn't answer for a moment, then,

"No. Roswell. This is too interesting. My bright-eyed friend has fled. Stopped suddenly and peered down, seeing with his electric eyes into the depths below, and then turned tail. Gone like a bolt. I want to see what frightened him."

I motioned to the crew to stop the winch. "Not tonight," I called to Wilton. "You're coming up."

"Roswell!"

"You're swinging at a thousand feet," I snapped. "There's a wind up here, and we're bouncing stiffly. I don't want to make a yo-yo out of you."

"Roswell, not yet!" he called. "There's something here, if I can get my beam on it. Something important—"

His voice died out. I shouted in the telephone. Somewhere in the bathysphere I heard a clatter, sharply metallic, as of something falling heavily.

"Wilton!" I yelled into the phone.

There was no answer from the sea.

I jerked my hand toward the crew. "Haul up," I ordered. "Give it hell!"

The engine creaked into reverse. We dragged a scant few feet of cable back onto the drum. The straining winch exasperated me.

"You men! Reel in that cable! Something's wrong—"

Over the telephone I heard a muttered whispering, "Damned strange—"

But in that instant from beside me came the shriek of ripping gears. The winch was breaking loose.

"Wilton!" I cried, sick with the sight of all that cable whirling down into the depth, the winch spinning, the sea beneath our bow hissing from the splash of plunging steel.

And then, as suddenly as it began, the cable ceased unwinding and grew slack. I knew the bathysphere had dropped, unchecked, a thousand feet.

I called again, hopelessly now, for that terrific plunge surely had crushed the bathysphere. Or if, by some miracle—a

deep cushion of sand or slime—it had escaped total collapse, the shock of its sudden descent must have smashed Wilton's body. Once again I called. There was no answer from the bathysphere.

My crew was working frantically to repair the winch. But that was sure to be a matter of hours, dismantling the machine and fitting new gears into it. I ran across the deck to check the air supply lines. The pressure in them showed constant. So far, then, the bathysphere was intact.

I tried the telephone again. There was a faint scraping, just possibly the movement of Wilton's body in the bathysphere. That was our ray of hope—and that was all.

The wind from southeast was freshening. The ship, bobbing, was riding on its anchor and the cable to the bathysphere. At any moment I believed our lines would snap, engulfing Wilton on the ocean floor. But at least, I knew, death would be instant then. The pressure of those two thousand feet of water would ram through the air lines like a piston, crushing him. I peered over the side. Two thousand feet! I turned back, shivering.

THE night dragged on while we worked, cursing underneath our deck lights. Toward dawn the wind abated gradually, and when I checked again, our air lines were intact. For the hundredth time I tried the phone.

Wilton's voice, low-pitched, came back to me. "It's all right, Roswell. I'm alive," he said.

I shouted jubilantly into the transmitter. "Wilton, thank God! How are you, boy?"

"Stunned for a while; that's all."

I looked toward the winch. The men were fitting the new gear to it. "We'll have you out of there," I called into the phone in my heartiest voice. "As you've probably guessed, the winch stripped its

gear. Couldn't quite take the strain."

His voice came queerly back to me. "That's not it, Roswell. I was dragged down here."

"Dragged!" I cried. "A thousand feet?"

"A whirlpool, Roswell. A suction from the bottom. That was what my beam-eyed fish friend saw and dreaded. A moment after we last talked all sorts of life streamed past the bathysphere, pulled down by this infernal current. The cable must have held me for a while, before ripping out. Then it was like plummeting in an elevator through the aquarium. An instant before I lost consciousness, the current suddenly seemed to reverse itself. That's what saved me, but not enough to keep me from being knocked out cold."

"But you're safe now," I said.

"Am I?"

There was doubt in his question.

"Of course you are," I answered reassuringly. "As soon as we can start the winch—"

That faint, metallic scraping interrupted me again. Before, I had thought it was the movement of Wilton's body. But now a sharp clang followed it, like the snapping shut of a giant forceps.

"Am I?" Wilton repeated, laughing alarmingly. "I'm not so sure of that. The bathysphere is tangled in some kind of net. Or else—"

"Or else what, Wilton? What's that scraping sound?"

He hesitated a moment. Again I heard the clang of metal from the Mediterranean's floor.

"I'm trying to pierce this murk with my beam," he answered in a tense, strained tone. "There's something down here, Roswell. Something that's grappling for the bathysphere."

"That's pure imagination," I called sharply. "Listen to me, Wilton. There's no other boat up here. What could be grappling?"

"What caused the suction that first dragged me down?" he asked.

"Doubtless some ocean current—"

The clang of metal startled me again. "You hear?" cried Wilton. "That sound came from outside, not from the inside of the bathysphere!"

"A derelict bumping against you!"

"No, Roswell, no! There—I've got the beam on it at last. Why, it's—"

Beside me, on the deck, a seaman pointed suddenly to the winch. "Look, sir! She's paying out."

Slowly the reel was turning as the cable moved into the sea. It meant the bathysphere was sliding on the bottom. That, or Wilton's inexplicable down-current was sucking at the cable.

"Wilton," I cried in warning, "the cable's reeling out again. Until this gear is fixed we're helpless here."

His voice came in a whisper. "Yes, I know. They've got me now."

"Wilton, *what* in God's name?"

"Andryne, Roswell. Or Andryne's ghosts."

There was such certainty in his tone, and such elation, that I knew the worst. The plunge down to the Mediterranean's floor, the awful tension of being trapped helplessly two thousand feet below, the imminence of death had cracked his all-too-imaginative mind.

"Ghosts!" I derided him, hoping somehow to soothe his mind. "Not even ghosts descend that deep. Get hold of yourself, my boy, or we'll be taking you back to New York in a straitjacket."

He laughed, deep in his throat. "They're in my beam, Roswell. I'm watching them. Amazing things, sheathed in a kind of translucent plastic, fashioned into diving suits. Swarms of them, Roswell, working with a huge machine of some kind they've fastened to the bathysphere."

"Wilton! Listen to me. For Pete's sake, man—"

And then I could not speak. From where I squatted by the telephone, I saw the cable reeling steadily into the sea.

FOR a moment I found myself in terror, thinking that what Wilton said was true, that some unearthly creatures had captured the bathysphere. And yet my mind rejected that. It was just possible that in those depths some weird marine life had surrounded him, and to his tortured brain they seemed like men. Men could not work at a depth of two thousand feet. Wilton was babbling, and we could not save him for many minutes yet.

Desperate, I turned toward the winch. A crewman standing there was staring up into the sky, screening his eyes against the dazzling blue of the Mediterranean morning. Then I too cracked.

"Damn you," I yelled at him, "get busy with that gear. We've got a man's life in our hands, and you're stopping to rubberneck—"

The seaman turned slowly. "Excuse me, sir. But there's a plane circling above us, very high—a flying boat, looks like."

"All right," I yelled. "So there's a plane. Now get back to your work."

I grabbed the phone. Wilton was talking quietly, as if I had been listening to it all.

"They're men," he said. "Yes, I'm sure of it. The plastic suits are slightly opaque, and I can't discern their bodies very well, but their movements seem human and certainly they have human intelligence. They're doing a swell job, Roswell, dragging this bathysphere. We're working toward a subterranean cliff, a sunken mountainside. Wait, Roswell, here comes one of them—"

It was sickening, hearing him rave like that. I wiped my dripping face and clasped the phone tighter into my hand.

"He's looking through my window," Wilton droned. "Very curious. I'm sure I see a human face. An almost human face, at least. He's motioning to me, pointing toward an entrance in the cliff. We're going in there, Roswell. Yes, that's it—they're taking me into the cave."

The winch was creaking heavily. The cable now was nearly all unreeled. And soon, I realized, the bathysphere would reach the end of it. What would happen

then, whether this incomprehensible movement would cease or the cable would snap, I dared not guess. But we were closer to the ultimate tragedy.

The seamen by the winch were staring up into the sky again. I glanced involuntarily. The plane, a flying boat, was spiraling lower toward us. Then, beneath its wings, I saw the black swastikas.

I grabbed the phone. Wilton was talking in a sing-song voice.

"They've got me inside now," I heard him say. "It's not a cave at all, Roswell. It's a tunnel, marvelously cut through solid rock. An engineering job, well worthy of the Chaldean scientists. We're waiting now. And, yes, there's someone coming through the murk in here. They're putting on some kind of underwater floodlights—Roswell! It's superb. This corridor is gleaming like the Aquacade. Remember that? And hundreds of these creatures are around me now. Hundreds of them, in their translucent diving suits. They're human, Roswell. I can see them now. And one of them—Roswell—"

The cable ceased unreeling. High above the Focke-Wulf Kurier was gliding.

"Roswell!" came Wilton's exultant voice. "She's beautiful. Incomparably exquisite, like the dream of things forgot. She's standing here beside the bathysphere, examining the air line and the cable. A door is sliding down across the tunnel now, shutting out the sea. I'm lost, Roswell. I'm never coming—"

A seaman jumped up suddenly. "The air line, sir! It's cut."

And, simultaneously, they got the winch started at last. The drum spun madly, reeling the cable in again, but too fast for the bathysphere to be attached to it. I heard the scream of diving wings. The Focke-Wulf Kurier, its black swastikas enormous in my eyes, bore down.

"Roswell!"

Faintly, over the phone, came Wilton's voice.

"Roswell, the cable and air lines were severed by the sliding door. But the phone wire seems smashed beneath it. Possibly it's flattened out and yet intact. Can you hear me?"

There was no need to reassure him now. We'd lost Wilton Chase.

"I hear," I said.

"Good boy, Roswell. This is good-by. They've pumped the water from the tunnel. Beyond another waterlock, now opening, the tunnel spreads into a mighty cavern, the bowel of some lost, forgotten mountain. This is it, Roswell. This is where they fled, the ancient peoples of Andryne, when those ages ago the Mediterranean swallowed up their isle. They've lived down there. They have perfected their long-fabled science in this world, fed by an air cave from somewhere upon the Mediterranean coast. I'm sure of that. No other way does it make sense. I'm going out now, Roswell. I'm joining them. Their queen is waiting for me now."

A shattering explosion ripped the phone line from my hands. A towering spout of water splashed upon our ship.

The Focke-Wulf Kurier's second bomb was true. The ship's stern splintered in a sheet of flame. I felt myself hurled through the air, crashing into the sea. A timber plunged into the waves just out of reach and I swam crazily for it, dazed.

MY RESCUE, hours later, by a passing British corvette is dull reading in these days of devastation on the seas. Perhaps it was just as well that it ended that way. Wilton, assuredly, was smothering in his bathysphere. He couldn't have survived long after his air lines were cut. And he was mad, insane, imprisoned on the Mediterranean's floor. But even as he died, his sparkling imagination lent him the semblance of new adventures. Great, incredible things.

Or could it possibly be. . . .