

# OMAR



CRAIG O.  
THOMPSON

### WHAT READERS SAY ABOUT OMAR (Comments on File):

"...Within pages, I was hooked and anxious to see where the whole adventure would go...I didn't spend much time eating or sleeping for a couple of days. (Thompson is) faithful to the genre in which (he) wrote while asking the reader to give more serious thought to the ideas brought up...a smashing success."

— Earl B. (NH)

---

"...guaranteed to hold your interest...WARNING!! You'll want more..."

— Roxanne T. (AZ)

---

"**Omar** is a well-written, well-researched, captivating novel. Craig O. Thompson has mixed politics, advanced technology, diabolically realistic characters into the greatest treasure hunt of all time. Intriguing, ingeniously crafted, excellent plotting all add up to a first-rate story."

— Janet P. (CA)

---

"...It has to be made into a movie...I'm telling everyone I know about (**Omar**)."

— Chris L. (VT)

---

"Finished **Omar**...good company during (an) ice storm...I usually find that my reaction to a book I like is a feeling of wanting more, when I reach the last page...and that I want to revisit its characters...I had that reaction to **Omar**!"

— Michael R. (ME)

---

"...I have just one word for the book. WOW!!! ...I ordinarily read other types of genre, but I couldn't wait to come home from work to dive in."

— Evalyn C. (MO)

---

"...It is a thriller! What vivid descriptions (he) weaves. I would certainly place (Craig O. Thompson) right up there with Jack Higgins, Stephen Coonts, and Clive Cussler.

— Alan L. (IN)

---

"I truly enjoyed Omar. Will probably read it again, soon..."

— Laela H. (CA)

**FROM BOOKSIGNINGS... (Comments on File):**

"This is one author you should have on your must-have list. (His protagonist) makes Indiana Jones look staid and a little boring by comparison...the right ingredients for a great read. ...many (customers) return on follow-up visits to get signed books for friends and relatives..."

— David J. Hermanson, Books Manager  
Hastings Entertainment Superstore (AZ)

---

"During three separate appearances, Mr. Thompson sold more books at each signing than any previously scheduled author. Would invite back again and again."

— Lee Loftus, Manager  
T. Charleston & Sons, Book Purveyors (MO)

## MORE COMMENTS ABOUT *OMAR*...

"In Print: Summer Reads" (Recommendation to Subscribers)  
— *Scottsdale Magazine*

---

"...a literary treasure...with high regard reserved for only those few writers who show brilliance...this work is clearly of that caliber."  
— Dr. John Maestas, Consultant, Published Author  
and Producer of 8 PBS Documentaries

---

"I am impressed by (Thompson's) strength of his storytelling, command of dialogue, and ability to evoke a scene...(with) text brought to a high finish...to a degree that one does not often see these days."  
— Joseph Foote, Journalist, Writer, Literary Consultant  
and Editor to the White House and Congress

---

"...Omar draws the reader into the story right from the opening paragraphs...(with) the usual twists, turns, and surprises that readers look for, know are coming, and--in the case of good writers --somehow are caught off guard. (Thompson writes) in the tradition of Robert Ludlum, Clive Cussler, (and) Tom Clancy..."  
— Rev. Paul Wharton, Historical Expert

---

"Omar is an exciting, thought-provoking novel...(an) outstanding page-turner (that) puts the reader in the story from page one...(with) the depth of Tom Clancy (and) story-telling ability of Wilbur Smith. *Omar* needs to be in your collection...can't wait for the sequel."  
— George Jones, Writer

**CRAIG O.  
THOMPSON**

# OMAR

---

A NOVEL

StrataGem Press  
Indianapolis

This book is a work of fiction. With the exception of events, names and companies factually and traditionally associated with the tragedy of the **Titanic** and those who are associated with the **Titanic's** discovery in the mid-80's, all of the names, characters, incidents, dialogue and plot events in **Omar** are fictitious. Any other resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical or electronic, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the expressed written permission of the Copyright holder, except where permitted by law.

Copyright © 1997, 2001 by Craig O. Thompson, Brightwater Enterprises, LLC  
Brightwater Publishing Company™ / StrataGem Press™. First Edition. All rights reserved.

Printed on acid-free paper. Cover design by Harriet McInnis.

#### **Publishers Cataloging-In-Publication Data**

(Prepared by Indianapolis / Marion County Public Library and IUPUI Library)

Thompson, Craig O.

Omar: a novel / Craig O. Thompson. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN: (Electronic) 0-9675207-2-X

(Softcover) 0-9675207-1-1 (Hardcover) 0-9675207-0-3

1. Oceanographers—Fiction. 2. Shipwrecks—Fiction. 3. Titanic (Steamship)—Fiction.  
4. Terrorism—Fiction. 5. Suspense fiction. 6. Treasure-trove—Fiction. I. Title.  
PS3570.H59687 O432 2001 813-dc21 00-191553  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 CIP

Brightwater Publishing Company / StrataGem Press  
P.O. Box 503, Greenwood, IN 46142-0503 USA

[www.brightwaterpublishing.com](http://www.brightwaterpublishing.com)

Or Contact:

Email: [BrightPub@aol.com](mailto:BrightPub@aol.com) / FAX: 1-317-535-3705

Published in the United States of America by StrataGem Press,  
an Imprint of Brightwater Publishing Company, Indianapolis, IN USA

PROLOGUE.....	11
PART I.....	15
PART II.....	69
PART III.....	263
PART IV.....	368
Glossary.....	602
Acknowledgments.....	613
About Craig O. Thompson.....	615



**PLEASE NOTE:**

**The following selected chapters are from the Electronic Version of the novel OMAR by Craig O. Thompson - ISBN 0-9675207-2-X. These chapters, and all preceding material, are for preview purposes only.**

**Any attempt to copy, print, disseminate, distribute or transmit any portion of this book, either in print form or electronically, without the expressed written permission of the copyright holder will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Please refer to the Copyright Notice page, above, for additional information.**

For those who love life  
And do not mistreat it.  
For those who are endeared to their children  
And will protect them at all cost.  
For those Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, and Hindus  
Who know we must love one another regardless of our  
Religious beliefs.  
And for those who know that violence is wrong.

*The opposite of love is not hate...it is fear.*  
Dr. Gerold G. Jampolsky

# PROLOGUE

APRIL, 1910

TIRED from the weight of centuries, the gigantic monster could hold no longer. It reached the Western coastline of Greenland and and three thousand years of snow accumulation, coupled with centuries of slow, creeping movement of the glacier, caused the immense iceberg to calve from its parent. It fell to the ocean with a tremendous roar and left behind an enormous glistening icefall on the sheer side of the glacier.

The furious, violent noise of its birth rumbled as an earthquake and echoed under the cloud cover throughout Jakobshavn Sound. Heard from Dundas in the north to Goldthab in the south, the loud report warned all—a berg of colossal proportions had taken up temporary residency in Baffin Bay.

*Perhaps ten thousand tons or more, they thought.*

The explosive birth sent shivers up and down the spines of knowing seamen. If measurements had been taken, it would have been charted as one of the largest icebergs of recent history—1100 yards long, 360 yards wide, 190 feet high, at sea-level, and 570 feet, or more, below the surface. Sailing somewhere out there, a berg towered over 19 stories above the waterline—higher than a Cutty Sark's tallest mast. Hidden below was a mountain of ice, in reverse, descending nearly 100 fathoms into the bay.

Sinking from its weight like a capsized ship, the top-heavy berg nearly rolled completely over, uprighted itself, then slowly rocked back and forth, for hours, to find its center of gravity. Enormous waves frothed like mad dogs, as they spread out for miles and pushed back and forth between land masses.

Then, there was silence—until the next calving.

The winds and current helped the berg overcome inertia and gain momentum. Following the northwesterlies, the massive iceberg found a counter-clockwise drift in the currents, and presented a clear, potential danger for anything in its path. With power equal to the force of an ice breaker cutting its course, it sailed through open channels and aggressively blazed its own trail through Arctic floes.

Standing tall among its brothers, the berg sojourned out of Baffin Bay, across Davis Strait, through the Labrador Sea, then out into the open waters of the Atlantic. For nearly two years the leviathan roamed, calving small chunks of ice, along with glacial rocks and sediment—disintegrating bit by bit as it meandered.

---

#### APRIL, 1912

As silently as it had slipped into the North Atlantic shipping lanes and the warmer waters of the swift Gulf Stream, the iceberg reached the Grand Banks, nearly 500 miles off the coast of Newfoundland. Though melting at a much higher rate, it was still over 100 feet tall at the water line.

During two years of drifting, the sea had sculpted, molded and shaped a primitive battering ram—at first hidden underwater—as though cloaked for a dangerous mission. Though pack-ice had broken off large chunks of the iceberg, the ram had remained intact and, as the berg lost weight, it rose slowly above the waterline—its metamorphosis now complete.

It had wandered and waited. A windjammer with its sails fully set—still towering over 10 stories above water. Below, its cumulus-shaped body quickly deteriorated, as warmer waters exacted their toll.

In an act of defiance, while reflecting the clear starlit night in

its towering sail of blackened ice, the berg found an opportunity to strike over the Great North Bank of the Atlantic Ocean, 11:40 p.m., April 14, 1912, at 41°46'N latitude, 50°14'W longitude.

In a deadly execution of might—drawn like a magnet—it rammed the starboard side of a ship, beheaded giant rivets, and split open the vessel with a crushing blow. It fractured and tore through cold, brittle steel plates, and small fissures raced as thunderbolts from one rent plate to the next.

Then, the iceberg silently turned and drifted back into the darkness.

And the *R.M.S. Titanic*, the greatest modern ship in the world, began taking on water.

Most icebergs would have moved on to slowly disappear and die in the warmer waters of their secret North Atlantic graveyard. But the ram had dropped off, and the berg went into an inertial circle. Following the rotation of the earth, it began its disintegration over the wreckage of the *Titanic* as it scattered its glacial ashes on the seabed graveyard below.

---

# PART I

**NORTHERN IRELAND—MAY, 1995**  
**00:20 Greenwich Mean Time**

IAN Harrison and Karen Addams headed back to their village from the Friday night dance at the Presbyterian Church in Belfast. They attended the social every weekend. Ian was accustomed to driving the dark narrow road across the gentle landscape of drumlins and hills, interrupted only by the marshy hollows.

The car windows were partially fogged and, with the defroster only working at half, Ian had split the driver's side slightly to allow more circulation. A cold breeze slipped through, watering his brown-flecked greenish eyes. Karen had snuggled her head against his wide shoulder—her lithe limbs curled across the front seat—and satiny red hair draped gently down his chest.

They enjoyed shocking their families and friends at church socials and other gatherings. Harrison was Catholic and Addams was a Protestant. Close friends thought them an attractive pair. And they were deeply in love.

Though objections were anticipated, Ian had already purchased a ring that Karen wore only when they were alone. They intended to announce wedding plans within the month, as soon as Ian's father was pronounced recovered from his bout with pneumonia.

For now, Karen would just flash her modest gold band in front of Ian's face—Ian swatting back at her hand as though it were an obnoxious fly—Karen laughing and giggling with each little tease.

It was Harrison who first saw the faint glow of lights as they came upon old Albert Bagley's farmhouse. Ian slowed his Ford and



gazed out across his fiancée's side of the car. The darkened fields rolled up the hill toward a silhouette of the once abandoned house, at the top of the drumlin.

"Look there, Karen, they must've sold old Bagley's property, eh? There's a glow of lights coming out the backside of the house."

Her sea green eyes searched her mind, as she sat up. "Haven't heard of any sale. Not since the old man died two years ago."

"Maybe they closed out the estate, huh?"

"I doubt it. Mum usually knows of all the goings on with the properties out here. And in the village. She hasn't mentioned anything."

Having passed the entrance, Ian turned the car around on the small Banbridge District road and entered the dirt drive leading to the farmhouse.

"Could be vagrants then," he said, his russet-colored hair tussled by a breeze through the window.

Ian's often adventurous fiancée suddenly was fearful. Her rosy cheeks blanched in the dim light from the dashboard.

"Where are you going. Are you crazy?"

"We'll scare them out when they hear the car. If they don't belong, they'll leave."

"No," Karen insisted, with an intensity that caught Ian by surprise. She grabbed the steering wheel and forced the car to the side of the road. It hit a rut and came to rest at an angle between the drive and an overgrown plot of gravel-filled farmland.

"Damn it Karen. What the devil's gotten into you?"

"I'm sorry, Ian. But it could be anyone up there."

"Yes, Karen, machree. It might be a new family, just moved in. Maybe someone who's fixing up the old farmhouse. It could use it you know." Ian's lean, ruddy face glowed with exasperation.

"I'm frightened out here in the middle of nowhere. Take me home." Her plea was more a demand than a request.

Annoyed at what Karen had done, Ian still gave in to her pleading. "All right. But you didn't have to pull us off . . ."

He put the car in reverse and stomped on the gas. A scraping

sound came from the front-end, and the rear wheels dug into soft mud from the previous night's storm runoff.

The headlights had gone out. Ian pulled and pushed on the switch, but both lamps were dead.

"Now look what's happened." He brushed aside his bushy hair and got out to survey the damage.

It was obvious even with the moonless night. His shoes stuck in the mud near the rear wheels. When he surveyed the front-end, he barely saw the Ford's bumper resting on an outcropping of solid glacial drift-covered granite. The front wheels sat two inches off the ground. He put his fingers to a headlamp and almost cut himself on broken glass.

"Look, you stay here. I'll borrow their phone to get a tow. Maybe they've got a tether to pull us out."

"Please Ian, don't go up there. Let's leave the car and follow the main road to the village. We'll return in daylight to pick it up."

"Nonsense," Ian yelled, from twenty yards up the road.

The young man approached the house, cautiously, as he first headed for the darkened front door, then decided, instead, to go toward the direction of the light. It seemed to come from Bagley's kitchen, around back.

Ian had been in the house several years before. The last time was when old Bagley's wife had died. The neighbors had chipped in to hold a small wake for her. Everyone in the village had come out. The Bagleys had farmed their mostly infertile, but fortunately patched, limestone-bearing acreage for over sixty years. Their two boys had moved on to America, and Mrs. Bagley eventually died of a broken heart. "Empty-nest syndrome," someone had said.

Everyone in the village watched Mr. Bagley attempt to keep his farm going. But it was too much for his old bones and, as Ian's father had said, Bagley "upped and died" on the day of his wedding anniversary. That was two years ago and the house had since been closed up tight.

"Hello," Ian called out at the back door. "We're having car

trouble. May we use your telephone?”

He was answered with silence. “Hello? Anyone about?”

The small clapboard farmhouse had deteriorated considerably in the two years since it was last a residence. The back door screen hung precariously from its hinges at a forty-five degree angle.

Ian stood on the top step looking in, with broken glass under foot. The back door window appeared to have been recently knocked out. A cold breeze, crossing the hillside, whistled through the door and Ian felt a chill bite the back of his neck.

“Hello? Anyone here?” He waited, “Hello.”

Ian turned the door handle. It was unlocked.

He entered the brightly lit kitchen, stepped on more glass, and noticed an almost empty whiskey bottle sitting open on the counter. But no glasses were present.

*Must've been a drifter*, he thought. "Looks like he left quickly."

Ian noticed an odor that comes from a house sitting closed too long. And there was a peculiar acrid smell that grew stronger as he moved to an open door across the room.

“Anyone here?” he asked weakly, becoming more nervous about the position in which he had placed himself. He reached through another door, into a darkened room, and felt along the cold wall for a light switch. The smell was now overpowering.

*Something's burning*, he reasoned. And then it hit him. *Gunpowder! The scent is fresh gunpowder.*

He clicked the switch and, when a bare overhead bulb sprang to life, he was startled to see a man lying chest-down on the floor, bleeding profusely from the back of his head.

“Mother-of-God.” Ian recognized the face of the dead man. For years, he had seen this sturdy, cleft-chined face on the front pages of newspapers, on television, and on wanted posters throughout Ulster—Sean Paisley, one of the more notorious of the Ulster Freedom Fighter splinter groups. Hero to some; assassin to others. Maker of bombs, killer of children. Even in peaceful times, he could not show his face in public.

He noticed a crumpled, blood-soaked map sticking out under

the body. Possibly a map of England, but Harrison avoided it.

Ian stood over Paisley for what seemed an eternity, trying to think what to do. Then he heard a gurgling sound.

A chill raced through his bones.

Startled, he turned and focused his eyes across the front room. Another man looked like he had been violently thrown against a timeworn couch. The man's eyes were wide open as he gasped for air. His once-chiseled face was now grotesque, as blood trickled out the corner of his pallid mouth. A massive chest wound had stained his shirt bright red. He lay perfectly still—his arms and legs outstretched—as though caught by surprise.

“John Springer!” Ian proclaimed. Elusive member of the Irish Republican Army. Also wanted for murder, mayhem and numerous bombings, depending on whose side one was on. Another man for whom peace had little meaning.

Here were two arch enemies in the same room, lying in their own pools of blood—a dead unionist and a dying nationalist. Neither had a gun in his hand, though Harrison saw a Smith and Wesson.<sup>38</sup> still tucked into Springer's boot. Someone had set them up.

*Was this a meeting of splinter groups the British and Irish Parliaments complained about?* he wondered.

The gurgling sound continued from the IRA leader. Ian watched his eyes shift and blink ever so slowly, as the man gasped for air and attempted to talk.

Springer struggled to move an arm. He would not give in until he got something across to this young man.

“Mr. Springer,” Ian found it odd hearing himself speak so formally to the terrorist. “Don't move. I'll get help.”

The terrorist gasped loudly and managed to moan, as if to say, “No! Don't go.”

Ian moved closer to the wild-eyed man as he curiously watched him rub blood from his own chest wound onto his index finger.

Disoriented and confused, but with every ounce of energy Springer could generate, he motioned for Harrison to come closer.

As he did so, Springer grabbed Ian's hand and held it to his chest in a griplock only a wrestler could manage.

Forcing Harrison's arm over, and holding it down with his own elbow, the terrorist inscribed letters, in blood, on the palm of Ian's hand. Frightened, Ian realized he could now pull away, but was curious about the message.

Struggling to maintain consciousness, the IRA terrorist dragged his blood-coated index finger across Ian's palm, as a pencil, to write the letter "A." He was losing consciousness as he next wrote the letter "L." Then, before he finished the third letter—a straight line down—his breathing slowed, his eyelids closed and he expelled a last defiant breath. John Springer's arm dropped limp to his side, and his body slid to the floor.

Ian raised his hand to see a roughly scratched series of three letters, "AL" and an upright line that might have been the beginning of another "L" or "B" or . . .

Suddenly, Ian remembered Karen and raced for the front door. It was nailed shut to prevent intruders. He turned to go back through the kitchen and stopped dead in his tracks.

Karen was cold, sitting alone in the car. She wanted to turn on the heater, but feared someone might hear the engine. Despite her concern, she was relieved to hear footsteps on the roadway. With a fogged windshield, she struggled to see the silhouette of a man walking toward the car. Karen rolled down her window.

"Was there a phone Ian? Did you call for a tow?" her voice filled with anxiety.

There was no answer from the figure now standing near the hood of the car.

"Ian? Is that you?"

Karen Addams was terrified. With no moon to light the night, she barely saw the figure out in front.

"Ian say something, please."

Then, she realized the shadowy person was larger than her fiancé, and fear oozed through her mind.

The figure moved to her side of the car. Out of instinct, Karen quickly locked her door, rolled up the window, then reached over to lock the driver's side.

The man knocked on her window. She was too petrified to look. He knocked once more. Karen slowly turned and forced herself to face him.

In the darkness, she knew the man was not Ian. In fact, he was not Irish. Karim Abdul Khorassani shoved his massive fist through the glass and grabbed Karen by the hair.

She never saw the knife.

---

#### WOODS HOLE, MASSACHUSETTS—06:04 EDT

THE phone broke the morning silence. Though an early riser, on the one Saturday Dr. Cary Parker thought he would sleep well past six, the ringing was especially loud and insistent.

A fresh aroma of salt-sea air wafted through a slit left in the bedroom window, and a faint golden sky gave the first hint of a warm spring day.

Victoria reached over Cary. Her graceful olive-bronzed body and long legs followed.

"Hello."

"Mrs. Parker . . . Colonel Bramson. Sorry to bother you so early. Is Doc awake?"

Cary's thighs moved seductively under Victoria. She laughed politely—her sloe, dark hazel eyes luminous.

"He is now."

Bramson, the CIA's Mid-east bureau chief, was a respected intelligence specialist, recruited from the Pentagon by the DCI. He had first approached Dr. Parker for consulting services, when Bramson moved to Langley a year before. And he wanted the oceanographer to glide into the provision of underwater support services

as soon as he felt comfortable with the agency.

Parker had declined the offer, but did sign on as an advisor with a yet-to-be-determined portfolio. Monthly calls from Bramson allowed Parker an opportunity to get to know him better. They had only met twice.

Split between summer diving expeditions from Woods Hole and his position with the Smithsonian, Dr. Parker had been too busy to attempt other work—even part-time.

To date, Parker had not performed an assignment that might earn him his unwanted “desk” at CIA.

Victoria cast a glance at the moving mass below her and softly pecked Cary on the cheek. He returned the kiss and marveled at how fresh she always looked in the morning.

“It’s the colonel.”

“Shit,” Cary sighed quietly under his breath, and stretched his sturdy, six-five frame out across the bed. With the sun rising a little earlier, Parker’s blue, tempestuous eyes caught the light slipping through the drifting curtains.

Victoria smiled, swept disheveled sandy-colored hair from Cary’s eyes, and pulled a sheet over their nude bodies in case the girls entered the room. High cheek bones on Cary’s sun-browned face gave way to disappointment, and he adjusted the receiver to an exposed ear.

“What’s so important on an early, and I stress early, Saturday morning?”

Bramson spoke in an even tone, “You’ll want to be in on this. You awake?”

“Yeah,” said Cary half-lying.

“They’re going down for the Ruby.”

Cary searched his groggy mind to interpret the apparently cryptic message. “The Ruby?”

“*The Rubaiyat . . . the Great Omar*. Dupont and Taylor have teamed to dive the *Titanic* again. This time they’re after the only other priceless relic left.”

It took a moment to sink in. “*The Great Omar*. . . They’re going after *The Rubaiyat*?”

“You got it.”

Cary sat up on his elbow. His body tensed and Victoria gave him breathing room.

“Those S.O.B.’s just won’t give up until every last vestige of the ship is raped.”

Victoria looked with empathy at the scientist lying beside her. In an instant, Parker’s chestnut tan had turned pale. The ghost had returned to haunt once more.

For eighty-three years, a priceless bejeweled, leatherbound edition of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* had quietly rested somewhere at the *Titanic*’s gravesite, out over the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, 2077 fathoms from the surface of the North Atlantic Ice Barrier.

An oceanographer and maritime law expert, Parker had supported and applauded the innovative *Titanic* expeditions—the first led by his famous colleagues, Dr. Robert Ballard and Jean-Louis Michel, whose Franco/American project had pinpointed and photographed the initial discovery in 1985; the second led by Dr. Ballard, himself, in 1986. And despite joint efforts by Parker, Ballard and the rest of the Woods Hole team to prevent undersea looting of the gravesite, they were sickened that the ship had, since 1987, been plundered on at least two dozen separate occasions. Mostly by the French and some American investors, and several times by Parker’s former partner, Henri Dupont, a Québécois from Montreal.

Parker had joined his colleagues and devoted years, since, in support of a ban on undersea recovery from the *Titanic*, and other ships that could be classified as gravesites.

But salvaging continued, and the original purser’s safe, thought to contain over \$500,000 in jewels and gold, and the jewel-encrusted *Rubaiyat*, still eluded underwater grave robbers. Referred to as the *Great Omar*, the book, if found, would be worth well over \$30 million.



Court battles had raged for years, between profiteer investor groups, for the rights to salvage the **Titanic's** rare artifacts and strip the ship for revenue. Deep-submergence treasure salvors came from every continent when the fever had hit.

Cary had hoped it would be decades, before the court granted permission to either side. But one scurrilous adventurer was finally awarded salvage rights, and he immediately pursued recovery of remaining artifacts and treasure from *Titanic's* gravesite. To complete the job, they would eventually have to destroy the remaining superstructure by cutting it apart, until only a bed of rust was left.

Now, it appeared a free-for-all was about to take place regardless of court orders or court awarded rights.

“But how does this concern you, Colonel? You’re Mid-East CIA, not Atlantic operations.”

“That’s why I called. Section Two informed me that not only is Dupont heading for the treasure...a terrorist plan exists as well. Except they want the *Great Omar* for blood-money.”

*Blood-money*, Cary pondered. “To finance activities?”

“Exactly. And there’s a link between the intended terrorist dive and Faheed Al Mar Ragem’s group.”

“Ragem? The fundamentalist leading terrorist attacks in Egypt?”

“Ultrazealot fanatic, yes. Fundamentalist, maybe.”

“I know nothing about terrorists. Why are you calling me?”

“With your background, we’re hoping to short-circuit this thing. Ragem’s a part of the equation. But it’s anyone’s guess who’ll get there first, especially with Dupont and Taylor hell-bent to go back down.”

*Go back down*, echoed in Cary’s mind. *No one was ever supposed to go back!* Bad enough divers had broken their promises to never salvage the *Titanic*. Now terrorists were a factor.

This was too much for so early a morning. Cary sank into his pillow and took a deep breath. He remained silent, hoping the

colonel would call someone else.

Bramson broke the silence. “Cary, you have to return to the site before the others.”

“Colonel, with all due respect, I’m not about to go down there again. We’ve promised never to take anything off that ship.”

“But we’ve got to keep both sides from reaching the *Omar*.”

“Look, it takes four to six months to prepare for an expedition, charter a ship, schedule equipment, crew.”

“You’ve done it in less . . .”

“We’d never be ready in time. Besides, we’ve already got our first contract using the new submersibles. I’m assisting a joint American and Russian project to locate a deep bed of manganese nodules. We’ll be in the Pacific. Nowhere near the Atlantic, if freshman geography serves me right.”

“Call Moscow and postpone it. I can arrange it with the American side.”

“Look Colonel, I don’t work for the CIA. Remember?”

It was true. Though Parker had signed on with an undetermined portfolio, he was not bound to provide services until more clearly defined. To Bramson, this was the perfect opportunity.

The agency’s nearly two-inch thick dossier on Dr. Cary Morgan Parker, underwater archeologist, was well researched:

Born Los Angeles, CA, September 25, 1954; President of See-Life, Inc.—an underwater diving, deep-submergence vehicle firm out of Woods Hole, Massachusetts; heads the Smithsonian’s Department of Oceanography for the National Museum of Natural History, where he splits his time and research with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

In the file’s summary pages it noted that, following a long dry struggle to finance expeditions and research—with years of proving himself worthy of project funding to establish credibility—Parker’s company was well-established and boasted a large list of corporate sponsors (holds major diving contracts with numerous

government agencies and private concerns, including the U.S. Navy, British Royal Navy, DoD's top-secret ARPA, General Electric, and the National Science Foundation).

Among other facts, the document listed Dr. Parker as:

Chair, U.S. Maritime Law Association; U.S. Delegate, Comité Maritime International; contributor to numerous international newsletters, maritime organization legal briefs/case studies; well-paid expert and author of nearly a dozen books on maritime law and archeological accounts of lost ships. Raised in Southern California; excellent physical specimen with few scars or injuries; non-smoker, moderate drinker. Married 14 years; two daughters (Marlow, age 12 and Jessica, age 8); shares avid interest in downhill skiing and scuba diving with wife, Victoria Alexis Parker (born Victoria A. Bettencourt, June 13, 1957, in San Francisco, CA); Victoria holds a B.A. in Art (1979) and M.A. (1981) from Kendall College of Art & Design; was part to full-time diving logistics coordinator and research shipmate at Woods Hole Institute (1981 to 1985); consultant for Suthmann, Collins and Folett, designer of public, institutional, and commercial spaces (1985 to 1989); for the past six years has run her own home-based interior design firm.

Hand-written at the bottom of the last page was a note that read, "Faithful, now."

"My apologies, Doctor," said Bramson. "I understand your feelings. But imagine our position. We now have a dangerous . . ."

"Colonel, we haven't even performed sea trials with our new submersibles. We're still on the Frasca simulator. It'll be weeks before we take the subs two and a half miles down."

"I understand," Bramson said, some sympathy in his voice.

"And the entire Woods Hole fleet is tied up with other projects. Several institutes on the eastern seaboard would give their eye-teeth for your project, not to mention Military Sealift Command."

“With your track record you’ve been requested, personally, by the director. Besides, M.S.C. can’t touch this. It’s too sensitive an issue for international waters.”

“Never stopped them before.”

“Take my word for it.”

“The weather won’t be in our favor for another two months. The current salvors are holding up until summer. And not even Dupont can dive until then.”

“Don’t bet on it. Appears your former French Canadian partner has picked up on Faheed Ragem’s plan, himself.”

“Dupont?”

“Through his contacts in Tripoli.”

“What contacts?”

“Every mercenary has contacts,” said Bramson. “Look, I’m certain their dive is imminent. Dupont’ll dive in the eye of a typhoon if he smells money. We know he approached Clayton Paul Taylor for financing.”

“C. P. Taylor . . .”

“They hope to beat Ragem to the punch. I’ll bet my next paycheck they won’t wait for summer.”

“That wealthy jackass will finance anything underwater if he doesn’t have to dive, himself.”

Clayton Paul Taylor was a wealthy oilman and ruthless investor. Openly rude, sarcastic and inconsiderate of others, “CP”, as he was called, regarded the masses as “the little people.” Everyone was beneath him—ready to be bought, used, then tossed aside—expendable as crumpled beer cans. A good-old-boy challenged by no one. Rumors lingered of involvement in the Kennedy assassination, but no one tied them with fact. A known racist, some swore he had direct connections with the KKK and the militia movement.

“You know Taylor,” said Bramson. “He dislikes anyone who tries to beat him—whatever his game.”

Parker felt the cool morning and pulled a blanket over his 208

pound physique. His forty-one years seemed to wear on him—a lifetime from the days when he never dropped the ball as tight-end for Stanford.

Bramson persisted. “I understand your feelings about *Titanic*. But terrorist advisories are quickly becoming a way of life for Americans. If we don’t keep those artifacts from greedy salvors, or worse yet, the terrorists, I’d hate to predict the outcome.”

“Colonel, I know as little about the location of that book as anyone. In all the dives it’s never been located. Let the Navy handle this.”

“The Navy’s waiting for you to finish development of your new submersibles. I understand you’re a little late completing the project. Perhaps I can buy some time.”

That stopped Parker cold. He did have a contract with the Navy and Pentagon to develop an entirely new breed of mini-subs—vertical, one-diver submersibles smaller, slimmer, and faster than any ever built. Their planned use: venturing into sea canyon depths never physically reached by man, and reaching secured and classified spaces too small for available manned subs to enter.

*Alvin*, the submersible used in prior dives, was too large for this type of project. At tremendous depths, smaller subs were needed to access areas aboard sunken submarines and ships that carry top secret equipment or nuclear weapons. Unmanned robotic subs, with photographic and video capabilities were an important part of the equation. And Parker had been one of the leaders in their development.

But experience showed that Parker’s high-concept sub would bridge the gap between the need to protect divers at extreme depths, and the necessity to physically explore, locate, or recover objects within smaller windows of opportunity.

That was exactly why Parker’s Woods Hole scientific team worked night and day to meet their construction deadline.

“Look,” said the colonel, “if you locate *Omar* before the others, you have several choices.”

“How’s that?”

“You could bring up the relic for permanent display at The Smithsonian, bury it under the sand at two and a half miles below the surface or, destroy it, God forbid, if Dupont or the terrorists get too close.”

Bramson waited for a reaction, but got none.

“Naturally, we’d prefer you bring it up. After all, the *Great Omar* was sold to an American and was enroute to its owner when the *Titanic* sank. Conceivably, we could trace descendants and present it personally.”

Parker’s heart sank at the thought of destroying anything from the *Titanic* for political reasons, let alone to prevent enjoyment of the beauty of an early 20th century artist’s work. And this unique binding of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* was known to transcend the work of all 14th through 17th century monastic artists who hand bound books—each a work of art.

Bramson interrupted Parker’s thoughts. “We need to meet at the Smithsonian tomorrow. I’ve requested the Boardroom next to your office. Can you make it down by 2:00 p.m.?”

“Sunday?” he sighed. “We’re taking the girls to Heritage Plantation. Jessica wants to ride the carousel.”

A long silence followed on the other end. Parker waited for a reprieve, but the colonel would not budge. Cary turned to his wife. Though disappointed, Victoria flashed an approving smile at a conversation she suspected was not going their way.

“Tomorrow. Sure. 2:00 p.m.”

“And bring your partner, Andrew Calder. Should I phone him?”

“No. I’ll see him at the Institute this morning.”

“Good. And, Dr. Parker, keep this quiet until we meet.”

“Right,” Parker agreed, with disgust in his voice.

“Tomorrow.”

“2:00 p.m.”

The phone clicked off on the other end. Cary looked at the handset as if to say, “Nice talkin’ to you.”

Bramson was never known for indulging in courtesy. Though

most of his associates respected him as a professional, brusqueness was his trademark.

Cary stared at the ceiling in thought. He had dreaded this moment for years. For over a decade Parker had been embroiled in international maritime law meetings to prevent this occurrence. But the politics of economic zones hampered progress.

*We've come so close*, he thought. Words from the podium circled his mind as he remembered a recent speech to the IMO. *It's only a matter of time before salvaging historic undersea gravesites will be outlawed. And maritime law will be enforced with internationally supported actions.*

"Henri at it again?" Victoria's soft, dark features highlighted her radiant, expressive face. As they quietly embraced, her auburn hair slid over her breasts.

"Afraid so. This time he's after the *Omar*. The Arabs want it too." He rested his head on his fist. "There's no peace for that ship."

Victoria understood how much it hurt Cary to have Dupont, his former partner, turned diver-for-hire, greedily breaking earlier promises. Before their children, Victoria had sailed numerous projects with her husband and Dupont.

On several occasions, Dupont had attempted an affair with Victoria. Though an independent woman, she loved her family as much as she had loved her days at sea. And though temptation prevailed—in close quarters aboard ship—Victoria ultimately dismissed Dupont's overtures.

Since travel was no longer possible, for weeks at a time, children and interior design projects filled the hours her husband was away. Cary knew of Dupont's advances toward his wife. And since the breakup with his former partner, he had referred to Dupont as "a ketch not fully rigged for sail."

Still, Cary didn't think Dupont crazy enough to attempt an Atlantic salvage expedition in unpredictable weather.

Questions flashed through Parker's mind. *Why do the terrorists*

*want the book? They've the financial wherewithal to finance a trip, but do they have access to deep-sea technology? Who's helping them? How can we possibly dive the mini subs without sea-trials? Has the Great Omar been eaten away by underwater microbes? Or was it buried by sand over time?*

For the moment, Cary was oblivious to Victoria as she stroked her fingers through his thick, sun-bleached hair.

Having never found the *Great Omar* meant salvors would tear apart the hull to locate it at all cost. By today's values, there was no telling how high the bidding might go at Sotheby's or Christie's auction houses—or on the black market—if the book was still intact.

Parker grew restless. He glanced at the clock next to the bed. 6:25 a.m. The previous week had been a rough one. Sleep had not come easy. And he was certain he was in for more sleepless nights.

"Put it out of your mind," said Victoria, her rich, calm tone soothing to the ear. "There's nothing you can do 'til tomorrow."

Cary sighed heavily, but remained silent in thought as his mind raced over the past.

Henri and Cary's joint pledge, supporting Ballard's appeal to never remove artifacts from **Titanic's** graveyard, was more than idyllic promises of two scientists. Much more. They had agreed to respect the spirit of those whose lives were lost in one of the most senseless, tragic episodes ever to occur on the open sea.

Somewhere along the line, Dupont had turned with the other salvors. His desire for a respectable place in history had mutated into the same avaricious desire that had ultimately driven the *Titanic* to its murky doom.

Dupont had shifted his allegiance. Someone at the Québec Institute for Maritime Studies had forced the issue back into Dupont's hands. No longer was there an obligation to preserve historic sites. Stronger than one's sexual appetite, it had become an unquenched, insatiable lusting for treasure—no matter what the price—to finance subsequent research.



Parker considered the future. If only the international community would approve the treaty they had worked on for so many years. They were extremely close. So few objections held them back now. If only . . .

Victoria moved her body closer. She kissed the back of his neck and gently caressed his thighs. He slowly turned to her and forced a smile. Then he kissed her thick, dark eyebrows, her glossy high cheekbones, and soon he found her lips. Vicky could always bring him back when he felt disheartened.

Cary had to be at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute by 9:00. For now, they would enjoy what few precious moments they could spend together.

---

**BAGLEY'S FARMHOUSE, BANBRIDGE DISTRICT, IRELAND**  
20:40 Greenwich

HEADLIGHTS pierced the fog like cold spears while multi-colored flashing lights reflected off the evening mist, and three Royal Ulster Constabulary police cars warned away the curious. The area was sealed off with police-line tape, to prevent intruders. And ambulances sat at the top of Bagley's road, awaiting word from the medical examiner to claim four bodies.

Rumors had already crisscrossed throughout Ulster, with varied reports of a mass murderer who had stalked the area the night before. But the detectives from Belfast's Castlereagh interrogation center suspected a different type of foul play.

Friends of Ian Harrison—and Karen Addams parents—had reported them missing, upon failing to return from the church social, Friday evening. A search of the region began in earnest by late Saturday morning.

By dusk, investigators had turned up an abandoned, but blood-stained Ford, driven into a marsh across the road from Bagley's

farm. Muddy tire tracks, crossing from Bagley's road, had all but washed away in a morning rain. Were it not for an inquisitive and observant passerby, the ghostly tracks may never have been seen.

Soon after, broken headlamp glass was found up Bagley's road. And the gruesome remains of two Irish terrorists, and a young couple—nearly beheaded—but lying together in death, were located in a back room of the musty house.

"I swear to ya', sir," said Shannon O'Dawd, "the last we saw of them two love birds was when they were making out in Ian's car."

"In the church parking lot," confirmed Erin Rooney. "They were to be married next Spring. No one else knew."

"Ian's dad is at hospital . . . pneumonia."

Both young men had spent time with Ian and Karen at the dance, before the couple headed for home.

"Never thought it'd come to this . . ." O'Dawd's eyes were wet.

Inspector Wickham looked carefully at each of them, then pulled up the collar on his overcoat as the mist turned into a light shower.

"You'd better get on home," said the inspector. "Take young Mr. Rooney here, with you."

Ian's friends turned from Wickham's black Vauxhall and headed for their car. They heard hysterical crying come from behind the house.

Karen's parents had arrived shortly before, to identify their daughter's body. Detective Crumlish stood across the way, attempting to console them.

Glyniss Addams was near collapse. And Lloyd Addams was beyond himself with grief.

"What happened here, detective?" Mr. Addams said bitterly. "Who took our daughter's life?"

"The perpetrators have left fingerprints everywhere," said Crumlish. "But it'll take some time to separate them from any

latent prints left by your daughter or her fiancé.”

Mrs. Addams looked at the detective questioning.

“What do you mean, her fiancé?” said Lloyd Addams.”

Inspector Wickham walked over and interrupted, having heard the last remark. He asked Crumlish to assist in the house, then turned to the couple.

“My apologies. Detective Crumlish would not have known you were unaware of their plans. Apparently, it was a secret. Only closest friends knew. It appears your daughter had hoped to tell you when Mr. Harrison’s father left hospital.” He paused to measure their response. “There’s a ring....Still on her left hand. The motive may not have been thievery.”

Mrs. Addams wept openly, and Mr. Addams looked harshly at the inspector, “My question has not been answered. Who was involved in our daughter’s murder?”

“These are sad times, indeed, Mr. Addams. It appears your daughter and her . . . ah, she and Mr. Harrison tragically stumbled into a terrorist safehouse. We have no idea why they were up here, but something went terribly wrong. We aren’t certain what it was, though IRA and UFF splinter groups were both involved.”

The inspector hesitated to report signs of other involvement. But closer inspection would hopefully resolve any uncertainties that existed. Until then, it would not be useful to disclose unnecessary information.

Mrs. Addams sobbed uncontrollably, and her husband made a vain attempt to console her.

From inside Bagley’s farmhouse, Detective Crumlish stuck his head out the door. “Sir, can you come in? You’re wanted by the ME. No sign of a struggle. But we’ve bagged the hands, just in case.”

“Be right there.”

“Bagged the hands . . .” said Lloyd Addams. “Our daughter’s hands, Inspector?”

“Each of the victims, I’m afraid. Standard procedure. We must check for DNA trace materials—hair, anything foreign under the

fingernails, from grabbing or scratching at the culprits.”

Wickham pulled a card from his coat.

“We’re waiting for the medical examiner to allow removal of the bodies. The coroner will perform an autopsy. And we should be able to release your daughter from the morgue, for interment, by Tuesday. This is my number. Call if you have questions.”

He turned to leave, then stopped.

“Oh, an officer will drive you home. You’re in no condition to do it yourself.” Wickham took Mrs. Addams hands in his and squeezed them gently.

“I truly wish I could be of more help. But, for now, this case leaves more questions than answers. My sincere condolences to both of you.”

---

## LONDON—WINTER, 1909

IT had been a cold blustery night. Early morning light, shaded by a still overcast sky, entered the small bedroom of the converted carriage house. Ice had formed on the mullioned windows. And Francis Longinus Sangorski had not slept well.

Even with a chill in the room, a recurring nightmare had caused him to break out in a sweat.

The youngest of four sons of Felix Sangorski, a Polish emigre, and his English wife, Lydia Clark, Francis Sangorski had beaten the odds, coming from common stock to become one of the most successful book binders in England. He and his partner, George Sutcliffe, began their business in a small attic in Bloomsbury, in 1901. Within two years, they boasted regular commissions from the noble-class and were able to move S & S to more spacious premises on Poland Street.

Regardless of their success, Sangorski was haunted by two factors. No matter how thriving his business, he was obsessed with the idea of binding a book the likes of which no one had ever seen; and his recurring dream stalked him without mercy.

“Francis?” his wife whispered softly across the pillows. “Are you all right?”

Sangorski turned to his wife, Rose. Beads of sweat covered his brow.

“You’ve had that dream again, haven’t you?” She blotted his forehead with her nightgown’s lace-end sleeve.

He smiled to keep her from worrying.

“It’s all right, Rose.” He gently swept back her dark,

waist-length hair.

“Tell me your dream. I feel helpless when you’re bothered by that dreadful thing . . . whatever it is.”

Sangorski rolled closer to his wife. He thought for a moment, not wanting to alarm her.

“It’s nothing, really.”

“Oh, codswallop,” Rose smiled. “You’ve said that for two years now.”

“There’s much on my mind—my work at the bindery.”

“Share your dream with me, please?” She looked into his large, square-jawed face. His dark, oval eyes belied the fears of a child. “I share mine with you. It makes me feel better.”

Sangorski’s eyes creased with a wide mustachioed smile. He relaxed as he gazed into Rose’s soft, pink face.

“All right.”

With determination, he sat against the sleighbed headboard. “It’s curious,” he began. “I’ve dreamt this numerous times, since boyhood. It must come from my fear of water.

“At age four, my father threw me into a pond. He thought a child learned to swim if dropped into water.”

“It must have worked. You swim now.”

“Actually, mother told me I went straight down. Father just stood there waiting for me to come up.”

“What happened then?”

“Mum jumped in after me . . . clothes and all. Then my father jumped in after her,” Francis laughed. “Must have been quite a scene. I don’t remember it. Only what Mum said. Though I can swim, it must have affected me in some way.”

“That was a long time ago.”

“It was years before I’d go in the water with friends. Until I was eleven or twelve, I always held my nose when I went under.” He glanced at Rose. “Must have looked rather foolish, huh?”

Francis lay his head against Rose’s breasts. Though he was only thirty-four, Sangorski’s hairline was receding regularly. She gently stroked his thinly covered head.

Rose waited patiently, knowing her husband was having a difficult time.

“For years I’ve dreamt about drowning. I can’t tell if it’s in the River Thames, the Trent or at sea.”

“Must be that silly pond.”

“It’s more than that. I’m not drowning as a child. I’m older. There are people around me. But I don’t care if I drown.”

“You don’t care?”

“Well, yes...I care. But it’s as if I’m fetching or trying to save someone....Or some thing.” Sangorski drifted into thought.

“The dream always begins with friends or relatives. We’re together around water. We’re drinking bitters and having a good time. Then it gets very cold. I’m in the water, trying to find something, and see everyone around me. Friends scream for me to come back. But I can’t. Something pulls me down. I struggle for the surface, still searching for whatever it is. But I’m pulled down.”

“What happens then?”

Sangorski looked at his wife. “That’s when I wake up sweating like a bloody pig.”

Rose preferred he not use such crude language in front of her, but she held back criticism.

“So many things are on your mind, Francis. You’re probably sorting them out.” Rose tapped him on the head with her knuckles. “There’s a new Doctor . . . Freud, I think, who says . . .”

“Wait,” Francis jumped from the bed and stood in his night-shirt, barefoot on the cold floor. “I know what it is. That damnable *Rubaiyat*. That’s it.”

Rose winced. “But you’ve bound *Rubaiyats* for some time now. Why would that bother you?”

“Not just any *Rubaiyat*, darling. *The Rubaiyat*. The one I’ve talked to Stonehouse about for the past two years. The greatest of all Omar Khayyam’s.” He pointed into the air.

“*That’s* what I’ve been searching for in my dream.”

Sangorski’s mind had focused for months on ways to bring the

binding about. Chills surged through his body—rejuvenated by an invisible force.

“I’ll convince Sotheran’s bookstore of its value to the trade.”

“But you’ve talked to them until you’re blue in the face.”

“Yet they know the caliber of my work. Even Henry Sotheran himself said as much. And John Stonehouse tells everyone he meets I’m the best book illuminator there is. . . . Well, I must admit, after my brother Alberto. But then John says that of Alberto when I’m not around.”

Rose left the warmth of the bed to hug her husband.

“Then try once more. They can’t say no forever.”

Sangorski’s face expressed an excitement Rose had not seen before. Many a dinner party included pleas with his closest friend, John Harrison Stonehouse—manager of Sotherans Antiquarian Bookstore—to commission the finest book ever bound. Stonehouse knew no better master craftsman existed than Sangorski. The Sangorski and Sutcliffe bindery was unmatched among competitors with their book forwarding and finishing skills.

It was Sangorski’s unbridled optimism that had attracted Rose to marry him—still as contagious as when they met.

“You bind for King Edward and Archbishop of Canterbury,” she said. “Maybe John Stonehouse will commission your *Rubaiyat*.”

Sangorski’s eyes lit up.

“What would I do without your encouragement?” He brought her to his chest. In one sweeping motion, Francis held her back slightly, looked into her eyes, kissed her and turned to prepare for work.

“This will be the day, I assure you,” he yelled from the other room. “Today we’ll begin the greatest modern binding in the world, or those bloody bugg . . . I apologize darling. Or those booksellers will wish they’d been bound *themselves* in Morocco leather, gilt in gold, and shipped off to Australia.”

---



John Harrison Stonehouse glanced to the street through the tall windows of Henry Sotheran's bookstore. He saw his friend, Sangorski, crossing carefully between the trams and lorries coming out of the nearby Piccadilly Circus. A smile crossed his face at the anticipated visit of his friend.

Stonehouse met Sangorski two years before. They had much in common to bond their friendship. Each loved books as they loved breathing. Both appreciated exquisitely bound and crafted works. And each had a zest and unbounded enthusiasm for their professions.

Stonehouse knew the acclaimed binder had studied with the finest artisans of their time, particularly Douglas Cockerell. Sangorski appreciated the solid business sense in John Stonehouse, and his ability to turn every book sale into an adventure. Both forgave each other's rather large egos and acknowledged the success their egos provided.

Stonehouse glanced out the window, once more, to check the whereabouts of his colleague. Sangorski still paced back and forth, out front. He stopped and sheepishly grinned at the bookstore manager, but made no move to enter. Stonehouse opened one of the large double doors.

"Frank, if you enjoy the cold, you should don a parka and join that American admiral at the North Pole."

"The cold helps me think," Sangorski moved toward the door.

"I should *think* it would make you seek shelter. Come inside, Frank," he laughed. "We'll brew some tea."

Frank, as everyone except his wife called him, was glad to be inside Sotheran's bookstore—each visit a banquet for his soul. The building's design was reminiscent of a small Venetian palace, with features more French and Flemish than Italian. Built of solid Portland stone, without the heavy cornices and projections that gave sanctuary to London's soot, it presented a Gothic effect that portrayed all the good in Edwardian architecture.

Sangorski's heart was warmed when surrounded by thousands

of books, all cared for like children in a nursery. The staff welcomed his visits, always pleased to share the rarest manuscripts or the most famous of autographs.

Dickens, his favorite celebrity author, had shopped at the store most of his life. And, until his death in 1870, Sotheran's had carried all of his books—many of them signed copies. One of the shop's prized acquisitions was his entire library, and a number of his personal effects.

On one occasion Stonehouse had pulled out Dickens' own snuff box and brandy flask. Frank imagined the old author pinching at the snuff, from his finely decorated pocket box, and inhaling the tobacco in a moment of thought.

"Over here, Frank," the managing director interrupted Sangorski's revelry. He had a private office on the lower level, but maintained a ground-floor desk for clientele.

Sangorski moved unhurried between the tables, smelling the combined aromas of fine leather and special paper, touching nearly every book as if saying "hello" to old friends.

"Frank."

"Coming, John."

John Stonehouse had a broad smile on his square-set face. A handlebar moustache accented his strong jutting chin, and serious eyes spoke of years of adventure and travel, in search of rare books on every continent.

"Something's on your mind, Frank."

"Does it show that much?"

"What is it, my friend?"

Sangorski could not raise the courage to speak of the *Rubaiyat*.

"It's the book, is it not?"

The floodgates opened. Frank turned to Stonehouse.

"John, we've known each other for some time. You know there's more in the execution of my work than in the bindings of others. The press reports it at every turn."

"I know each of your bindings become more elaborate and

ambitious an undertaking.”

Stonehouse was predisposed by Sangorski’s vigor; his passion for his work; and his dynamic personality that made it difficult to say no to anything Frank wanted. John found it odd that a man of this depth and breadth would have such a love for book binding—and the thankless hours it took to create each masterpiece.

“You’ve seen my designs with the peacock and grape vines. You’ve said yourself that my rendering of Symonds’ *Wine, Women and Song* was the most exquisitely beautiful binding you’d ever seen. I believe those were your words. ‘The most exquisitely beautiful.’”

“Yes, I believe I did say that,” John smiled. “And it sold immediately.” He knew what was coming.

“John,” Sangorski took a deep breath. “If that book could be compared to the beauty of Aphrodite, as you also said, then I know you’ll compare my *Great Omar* to the glory of Juno.”

Stonehouse stepped back as though imagining a magnificent painting not yet there. He spoke grandly, “The **Great Omar**.”

Sangorski waited for something more, but Stonehouse prolonged the agony.

“You know I’ve seen that play, *Kismet*, nearly a dozen times,” said Frank.

“Yes, and it’s had a heady effect. You’ve told me of it no less than a dozen times.”

“And you’ve seen my sketches inspired by its scenery and the riot of colors in its designs. Believe me, John, I know this binding would bewitch the Sirens into singing a different song.”

Stonehouse laughed. “You’re mystically inspired.”

“Don’t make light of me,” Sangorski pointed a thick, blunt finger at his friend. “I’ve never had the opportunity to accomplish anything so wonderful.”

He gazed directly into John’s face. “If only someone would commission me to bind Veddar’s *Omar Khayyam*.”

“Picture *this* Sangorski and Sutcliffe masterpiece in your mind’s-eye, John. I’ve gone over it a thousand times or more, in mine.

“Imagine gold covered inlays, the likes of which you’ve never seen, each set with numerous . . . no, hundreds of jewels. Rubies and amethysts, topazes, and turquoises. And a bright green emerald to glisten at the reader as he’s helplessly drawn into the beauty of my design.”

Sangorski leaned back on his heels, emphasizing every word with expansive gestures. His large hands flowed through the air as paintbrushes on a canvas.

“I’ll stand three peacocks in the middle of the front cover. They’ll be surrounded with more jeweled decoration than has ever been dreamed of before.”

Sangorski was totally absorbed in his own world. His trips into the imagination fascinated John. He knew it was just such spirited journeys, over the centuries, that had created masterpieces by other craftsmen like Le Gascon and the Mearnes. He listened intently to the dream.

“Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat* is the essence of eleventh century Persia. It’s the soul and all-embracing wisdom of one man who understood that essence and who understood the entire process of life from birth to death.”

Sangorski went on—oblivious to others in the shop. “In that spirit I’ll have symbols of life and death on each cover. The doublures will be cut into sunken panels, richly inlaid with many colored leathers—and more jewels. Gold, will clothe the book like Athena the Virgin, and will peer back from every gilded corner of the binding—green Levant morocco binding. The flyleaves will be in brown morocco, elaborately inlaid and gold-tooled. And . . .”

“More jewels?” John relished gibing his friend.

“Yes. Then I’ll complete my design, on the back cover, with a Persian mandolin carved of African mahogany—inlaid with silver, satinwood, mother-of-pearl and ebony.

“And,” another blunt finger gesticulated in the air, “with actual strings to be played.”

Sangorski looked straight into the eyes of Stonehouse, who now felt chills of excitement.

“John,” Sangorski spoke slowly and with resolve, “when you pick up this masterpiece, and hold it dearly in your arms—then, and only then, you’ll know you’ve met up with the world’s greatest bookbinder.” He waved his finger at Stonehouse once more. “Then you will know, my friend . . .”

John placed his forefinger solidly on Sangorski’s chest, almost knocking him off his heels as he interrupted.

“All right, Frank, go ahead and do it.”

Surprised at the interruption, but not grasping John’s words, Sangorski continued, “I shall use Veddar’s Royal Quarto version to . . .”

“Frank. Go ahead and do it! Bind your . . . *Great Omar*.” Stonehouse’s voice had attracted the attention of everyone on Sotheran’s ground floor.

“What? Do you know what you’re saying?”

“Yes,” John laughed. “Do it and do it well. There’s no limit. Put what you like into the binding. Charge what you wish for it. The greater the price, the more I shall be pleased. Provided, of course, that what you do and what you charge will be justified by the result. And the book, when finished, is to be, as you have said ‘the greatest modern binding in the world’.”

Francis Longinus Sangorski was speechless. He faced his friend and associate, surprised he had finally won the commission.

“These are my only instructions,” concluded John Harrison Stonehouse, Managing Director of Henry Sotheran & Company, Bookseller to His Majesty the King.

---