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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MAN WHO FOUND OUT ***

The Man Who Found Out

By Roger Dee

**It's one thing to blow a bubble of glib,
journalistic lies. Quite another to have that
bubble burst in a nightmarish, green beyond.**

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Roger Dee! The name has a fine, myth-making flavor, hasn't it? You'd almost know that our ebullient author—his work has appeared in many magazines—would excel in just such superb fancy-free flights of humorous scientific fantasy as he has brought you here with a spectral chuckle.

The trouble with Fortenay was that he was not merely a skeptic but a professional skeptic, which is just another way of saying that he was a widely known and highly paid journalist who had long ago learned to capitalize on his penchant for iconoclasm. Fortenay was also given to the sort of reflexive arrogance inevitable to some small men, and was unscrupulous enough in its exercise to point up the flavor of his satiric commentary on any currently news-worthy phenomenon with the strong spice of semantic misrepresentation.

Fortenay was, in short, an able, intelligent, ambitious and thoroughly offensive little heel. He was precisely the sort who should never have been permitted in any responsible capacity aboard a scientific vessel like the oceanographic survey tug *Cormorant* when she was in the process of investigating a find as important as the gigantic artifact which Dr. Hans Weigand had discovered in the six-mile abyss of Bartlett Deep just south of Cuba.

But Fortenay's publisher was a power among politicians as well as among publishers, so Fortenay was able to announce in his syndicated column that his readers would receive on-the-spot coverage of the investigation, and that no smoke-screen of scientific doubletalk should keep the truth from them.

The announcement was greeted with great interest, since various disturbing rumors concerning the nature of Dr. Weigand's discovery were already in circulation. Most of them—since Dr. Weigand himself was frankly unable to offer any clue as to their origin or purpose—were elaborated upon by Fortenay and his colleagues with less regard for truth than for dramatic effect.

As a consequence, the newspaper-reading public was torn between a number of equally improbable theories which supposed that:

Dr. Weigand's find was not an artifact at all, but a monstrous bubble of molten basalt blown up ages before by a subterranean volcano and frozen solid by contact with sea water. A patent impossibility, since the thing occurred in an area free of any early vulcanism and was, by accurate sonar measurement, a sharply-defined oblong body some six miles long, three miles wide and two miles high.

It was an artifact of recent construction, being nothing less than an undersea Russian submarine base built secretly during the Korean diversion and designed to obliterate the Americas under a rain of hydrogen bombs.

It was a colossal structure erected by the inhabitants of an antediluvian country like Atlantis and inundated by the waters of some prehistoric flood.

It was, despite Plato's insistence that that mythical land lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules, Atlantis herself.

It was neither of these but a self-sufficient city built by a naturally marine race of men who had taken a divergent line of evolution and who might, for all anyone knew, be plotting a war of conquest against the honest, industrious, amicable and God-fearing nations of topside humanity.

None of these, Fortenay pontificated, was likely. Only one fact could be accounted certain, he added with clarion determination, and that Fortenay himself, armed with the invincible power of the press, would Find Out.

And Fortenay did, because Fortenay never let his readers down.

By luck, the journalist boarded the *Cormorant* just in time to keep his promise, for the tug's straining winch was in the process of swinging from her deck the quartz-glass bathysphere which Dr. Weigand had designed for plumbing the Bartlett Deep.

Fortenay's appearance was a source of instant consternation to Dr. Weigand's staff, who had been at their business long enough to know public-relations trouble when they saw it. Promptly they shifted the problem of Fortenay's disposition upward through the chain of seniority to Dr. Weigand himself.

The old oceanographer, in answer to their frantic calls over his bathysphere telephone, unscrewed the circular hatch of his quartz-glass ball and put out his head much after the fashion of a bearded and bifocaled bear peering from his winter den. He made a desperate attempt to close the hatch when he recognized Fortenay, but Fortenay was not to be denied.

"Hold everything!" said Fortenay, in effect. "I am here, in the interests of God and country and twenty million newspaper readers, to investigate this investigation."

Dr. Weigand protested the interruption of his work, and Fortenay invoked the power of the press. Worse, he threatened the good doctor with the personal wrath of Fortenay. His logic was wonderfully cogent.

Dr. Weigand's project depended largely upon government subsidy, and Congress controlled such subsidies. The people controlled Congress, and Fortenay controlled public opinion.

"I'll have them screaming for your head on a pike," Fortenay swore. And Dr. Weigand, who had lived long enough to understand that Fortenay could do just that, reluctantly surrendered.

Fortenay was a tyrannical little heel, but he possessed a certain amount of physical courage. "I'm going down with you, Wiggy," he said, "and see this Lost World shanty for myself."

And Fortenay went down, because he was confident that he would come up again....

Their descent into Bartlett Deep would have been enthralling to Dr. Weigand without Fortenay's company, and deadly dull to Fortenay without the doctor's. As it developed, Dr. Weigand could only moon like a distracted bruin on his leather bathysphere seat and peer miserably out at the marine wonders rising past his eyes, while Fortenay occupied himself with assessing the oceanographer's motives in pursuing an investigation so hare-brained.

For Fortenay did not believe for a minute that it was an artifact which Dr. Weigand had discovered, but a natural and therefore profitless formation. His suspicions were confirmed when he learned that the bathysphere could descend no more than a mile into the six-mile basin of Bartlett Deep without being crushed—to borrow a simile from Fortenay's ready stock—like an eggshell under the mounting pressure of water above.

Since the thing at the bottom stood only two miles in height, it followed by simple subtraction that three miles of dark and watery distance must remain between the cameras of the observer and their target. The only possible inference was that Dr. Weigand had built the bathysphere for the sole purpose of titillating popular interest and so justifying a request for additional funds for his project.

"It gets your name in the papers," Fortenay said with caustic irony. "And makes it easier to bilk the taxpayers next time. And if you're forced to admit it's only another volcanic chunk then your project will still be in the black, won't it?"

The unexpected attack, to tap Fortenay's gift for simile again, knocked the oceanographer for a devastating loop. His reasoning had been much as Fortenay guessed, though the difficulty of maintaining a truly important scientific project without government aid had seemed more than enough to justify the trifling subterfuge.

The doctor saw his mistake now, and while the bathysphere sank lower and lower into the darkening water he sought frantically for a loophole of escape from the disaster he foresaw in tomorrow's newspapers.

He might have saved himself the effort. Fortenay had already headlined his report, and his only interest now was in the sport of baiting his victim....

The exposure of fakes, quacks, mountebanks and myths, Fortenay declared, was his specialty. He offered copious proof.

"There was that pig-tailed brat in Arkansas," Fortenay said, "who claimed she could levitate pianos and start fires by crossing her eyes. The local papers had half the country believing it until I went down and bluffed her into a test demonstration with arc lights and a TV hookup. Maybe you caught that show—the act was a gyp, and I showed the world. You never heard from *her* again, did you?"

Dr. Weigand recalled the incident, and thought with some commiseration that the nervous breakdown which followed the neurotic child's exposure to Fortenay's baying attack might have been responsible for the loss of any poltergeist power.

"And those three jokers in Ohio," enumerated Fortenay, "who claimed they found a dead flying-saucer pilot. I bought it from them and proved it was only a carnival baboon dipped in laundry blueing. I got those jerks three years for fraud."

And here am I, thought Dr. Weigand, an honest man and a respected scientist, about to suffer a punishment even more terrible at the hands of this trumpeting little ferret because I have sought to keep my project alive. He will shout my little indiscretion from his journalistic housetop and my reputation and my job will go like fog before the wind. I will be discredited and my Anna will hang her head before the neighbors and my little Karen and Wilhelmina, who know nothing of it, will be jeered in the schoolyard....

"Ach," said the doctor, who seldom said *ach*. "It should not happen to a dog. Not yet even to a hyena!"

"—dowser in Oklahoma who charged fees to locate water," Fortenay ran on relentlessly. "He got away with that racket until I went out with some geological experts and a cameraman and showed him up. After that—"

After that, thought Dr. Weigand, the poor fellow's gift was destroyed along with his confidence, and there was nothing.

But the doctor's commiseration rang hollow even to himself, for it had occurred to him suddenly that it might not be necessary, after all, for this thing to happen to him and to Anna and Karen and Wilhelmina.

It would mean the end of Hans Weigand, of course, but his project would go on. He would be not a heel but a hero, and his family would be pensioned instead of pilloried. And what is death to a true scientist, when the man must die anyway but his reputation may live forever?

"—trouble is that people are so *gullible*," Fortenay was expounding. (He pronounced it *gullable*, not that it mattered.) "They'll believe anything they're told as long as it has its roots in some old myth or legend handed down to them. They'll believe it if their fathers believed it, because they're fools."

He leaned across the cramped cell of the bathysphere and tapped the doctor on the knee.

"And do you know why people are fools, Wiggy? Because scientists *teach* them to be fools. Every superstition that people cling to was handed down from the time when wise men—the scientists of the day—taught it as gospel truth. Scientists are always making some kind of mistake, and the people foot the bill.

"A few years ago they made an error in some law about variable stars, a little bobble of a hundred per cent, and now they're saying the whole universe is twice as big as they'd been teaching.

"And do you know why scientists make stupid mistakes, and why they change their stories ever so often? Because they're fools too, and thieves into the bargain. Like you, Wiggy."

"I *must* do it," Dr. Weigand muttered. "Yes, I think certainly. It is the only way."

"Scientists are always starting myths," Fortenay gabbled, never dreaming of what went on behind the doctor's bifocals. "Take the legend of Atlantis, for instance."

The soft sheen of undersea light, like a patina of moonbeams filtered through deepest jade, was lost on him. The deep-water cold of Bartlett Deep that crept through the quartz shell of the bathysphere troubled him not at all.

"When a hairy old Greek named Plato wrote a book about Atlantis, everybody believed him because he was a scientist," Fortenay went on. (He pronounced it *Platto*.) "And now you pop up with a story about an undersea artifact—you might as well have come right out and called it a building—and what you're really trying to do is to start another crazy myth about a drowned civilization right here in our own backyard. That's the way these lies start."

He might have enlarged further upon his topic if Dr. Weigand had not stood up suddenly, like Samson in the temple, and yanked an innocent-seeming lever that disconnected the bathysphere from its overhead cable and let it drop like a stone toward the bottom of Bartlett Deep.

"Perhaps we start a little myth of our own, you and I," Dr. Weigand said as the telephone wires ripped loose. "Perhaps our friends up there will say to the newspapers that a sea monster came up and ate us, *nicht wahr?*"

Fortenay, of course, sprang upon the burly old oceanographer in a frenzy, and of course accomplished nothing.

Dr. Weigand took him by the shoulders and replaced him in his leather seat.

"We can neither of us do anything now," the good doctor said. "Sit, Mr. Fortenay, and tell me more about how you do not believe in myths."

Fortenay sat, but said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

Fortenay sat for a long while and breathed hard through his thin inquisitive nose while the bathysphere sank down and down into gathering green darkness. After a time it dawned upon him with a great rush of relief that Fortenay the columnist, whose facile wit daily entertained twenty millions of people, could not possibly die in any such fantastic fashion.

It simply couldn't happen. He was the victim of a peculiarly vivid dream—three-dimensional, complete with technicolor and tactile sensations, but still a dream—from which he must waken shortly.

But there was no denying that it was a horribly convincing dream. The monstrous artifact he had come to investigate—it really *was* a building of some sort, he saw now, and not a ruin at all—rose closer and closer until its vast top spread out under the bathysphere like a mossy green plateau.

A random eddy of current caught the bathysphere and pushed it gently outward as it sank, so that it missed the edge and fell on toward the bottom, and the barnacled wall that slid up to tower over Fortenay was as blank and final as the rim of the world.

They were approaching the bottom of Bartlett Deep when they saw the first gigantic splashes of lettering, emblazoned like the heraldic script of a Titan across the face of the wall. The doctor was beside himself with the frenzy of his discovery, but could make nothing of it because the wall was much too near. It was like looking at a billboard from a distance of six inches, and so Dr. Hans Weigand passed the last moments of his life as he had lived the greater part of it, in disappointment and frustration.

Fortenay, bemused by his dream, took no such interest. Actually he felt a little smug that he should have had the acumen to recognize it for what it was even before he woke and that he should have been able, even in the grip of a nightmare, to face down a big-time myth-making scientist like Wiggy on his own ground.

All this would vanish soon, he told himself, even as the first sudden tracery of strain-fissures appeared in the quartz-glass shell of the bathysphere. A dream is a myth and a myth is a dream, and he would wake up soon—

The bathysphere burst, crushed, as Fortenay would have said, like an eggshell.

Fortenay woke, not from a dream but from an existence. He found himself standing on a smooth floor of shell before a vast and featureless building whose facade towered mistily up out of sight. Little eddies of current bore tiny, feathery creatures that brushed past and through him, glowing

phosphorescently. Glittering fragments of the shattered bathysphere fell like a rain of outsized diamonds about his feet.

Dr. Weigand stood beside him, bifocaled eyes speculative, his whiskers comfortably afloat like seaweed in the green water.

"I think we go inside when the door opens," the good doctor said.

"Inside?" echoed Fortenay. "To what?"

"To a myth," said Dr. Weigand. "A myth that was made for such lost ones as you and I."

Fortenay saw the legend then. It was far up on the facade, above the doorway, and at such a distance the quaint antique script, like its meaning, was wonderfully and fearfully clear: DAVY JONES' LOCKER.

The door that opened led downward and outward, companion-wise, to a green and enigmatic beyond.

"Let us go, my little friend," said Dr. Weigand. "It is better not to be sent for, I think."

And Fortenay went, because he had no choice.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MAN WHO FOUND OUT ***

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