

4. The Lost Continent

After my unfortunate treasure hunting experience off the coast of Tinos, I decided to head back to Athens. I couldn't see no sense purchasing a first-class compartment that might better go to visiting royalty, assuming any such was in the area and hankering for a night on the town in Athens, so I moseyed up the track about a mile, figuring to hop a lift in a freight car and save the price of a ticket.

Well, it turns out that I wasn't the only guy with that idea, because I found an old feller sitting next to a small fire, warming up a cup of coffee in an empty tin can.

"Howdy," I said. "You mind if I join you?"

"Help yourself," he said in perfect American. "You sound like a countryman."

"The Right Reverend Doctor Lucifer Jones at your service," I said, shaking his gnarly old hand.

"Pleased to meet you," he said. "I'm Zachariah MacDonald, from West Allis, Wisconsin."

"We're practically neighbors," I said. "I hail from Moline, Illinois—though I ain't been back there, or even to America, in many a year."

"Me neither," said MacDonald. "What are you doing here in Tinos?"

"Mostly looking for a way out," I said.

"I mean, what are you doing abroad in the first place?" he asked.

"I heard the siren song of romance, mystery and adventure," I said. "As well as the footsteps of various biased and misguided prosecuting attorneys coming up behind me."

"Where are you off to?" he asked.

"Oh, it don't make much difference," I said. "Athens seems as good a place as any."

"You don't sound wildly enthused," said MacDonald.

"One place is pretty much like another," I said. "It all depends on the opportunities."

"Now there we disagree," he said. "I find all places absolutely unique and different from each other. For example, have you ever been to Africa?"

"Yeah, I spent a few years there."

"And you've no desire to go back?"

"Desire ain't got nothing to do with it," I said. "I been invited to keep off that particular land mass due to a series of innocent misunderstandings by the local authorities."

"How about Asia?"

"Same problem," I admitted.

"Can you go back to America?"

"Well, I think I'm still allowed in Montana and Arkansas," I said.

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“Well, I think I'm still allowed in Montana and Arkansas,” I said.

“It sounds like you've led a most interesting life,” he said, backing off just a bit.

“I'm just a God-fearing man of the cloth who's trying to establish a

tabernacle and bring the Word of the Lord to all these depraved Europeans.” I paused. “How about you, Brother Zachariah? What brings a Wisconsin man to this here forsaken little spot in the Greek countryside?”

“The culmination of my life's work,” he said.

“You been working all your life just to sit here and hop a freight for Athens?” I asked. He shook his head. “Of course not.”

“Well, then?”

“I was a professor of geology at the University of Wisconsin for close to thirty years,” said MacDonald.

“My special field of study was lost continents: Lemuria, Mu,

Gondwanaland, and the like.”

“Yeah?”

He nodded. “Most of them are myths, of course—but about twenty years ago I became convinced, from certain hints both in Plato and elsewhere, that Atlantis actually existed, that it was not merely a myth.”

“And you think it's somewhere near this here railroad track?” I asked.

“No, of course not. Over the years I pieced together every bit of data I could get my hands on. Then, when I was sure I was right, I quit my job, cashed in my life savings, and went hunting for it.” Suddenly he smiled triumphantly. “And four months ago I found it!”

“Funny how that little piece of news

didn't make the papers,” I said.

“I haven't made it public yet,” he said. “There are others who are also searching for it, who would gladly kill me if they knew I had found it first. I'm on my way to stake my claim right now.”

“If you can't afford to buy a ticket on the train,” I said, “how do you figure you to pay for a whole lost continent?”

“Oh, I've got the money,” he said. “It's safely tucked away in a bank in Athens. But my competitors—no Cretins, they—have finally figured out that I found what I was looking for, and there have been a series of attempts on my life. I'd have been a sitting duck at the Tinos train station.”

“Well, if they know that Atlantis is

near Tinos, ain't they likely to buy it out from under you anyway?" I asked.

"It's nowhere near here. I've been in Tinos for a month to throw them off the scent." He frowned. "The problem is, I did too good a job of it. I convinced them so thoroughly that it's near Tinos that they now feel free to kill me." Suddenly he stared at me. "You seem like a man of action, Doctor Jones. How would you like to hire on as my bodyguard?"

"Well, the Tabernacle of Saint Luke is a mite short of funds these days," I allowed. "What's the job pay?"

"Five thousand dollars, for a week's work."

"Brother Zachariah," I said, "you got yourself a bodyguard."

“Excellent!” he said, shaking on it. “By the way, I don't believe I've ever heard of the Tabernacle of Saint Luke.”

“Well, it ain't real well established around these here parts,” I admitted.

“In fact,” he continued, “I'm not aware of any church or tabernacle named after Saint Luke.”

“Well, it seemed more modest than calling it the Tabernacle of Saint Lucifer,” I said, “me not yet having been canonized or nothing.”

“You're a very enterprising young man,” he said.

“Well, the Lord teaches us to grab what's there.”

“He does?”

“I practice an exceptionally

aggressive form of Christianity,” I explained.

“Where did you learn it?” he asked.

“Oh, it's just something me and the Lord worked out betwixt ourselves of a Sunday afternoon back in Moline,” I replied. “So far it's served me pretty well, except for them occasions when it hasn't.”

Well, we chatted for a few more minutes, and then the train came along, and we hopped into a open cattle car and slid the door shut. The train stopped at Tinos for about five minutes, no one looked into our car, and then we took off again, hitting Athens about six hours later. We waited til the station was pretty much deserted, then caught a cab

and went straight to the Grande Bretagne Hotel, where MacDonald had an account, and they gave us a pair of connecting rooms on the sixth floor, overlooking Constitution Square. He was afraid to go down to the restaurant, so we had room service deliver us a dinner of dolmades and mousaka and pastitso and saganaki and all kinds of pastries, and by the time we were done I was wondering why I hadn't discovered the bodyguard business a long time ago.

Then a shot rang out and the window shattered and we both hit the floor, and I realized that there was more to bodyguarding than met the eye.

“Get out your gun!” he whispered.

“I don't know quite how to tell you

this, Brother Zachariah,” I said, “but I ain't got no gun.”

“What kind of bodyguard are you?” he snapped.

“Right now I'm concentrating real hard on being a live one,” I said. “Beyond that, I ain't too particular at this here point in time.”

“Did you at least see where the shot came from?” he asked.

“Well, if it didn't come from outside, we're in a lot more trouble than I hope we are,” I answered.

“What use are you?” he demanded.

“Well, I never claimed to be a bodyguard by trade,” I said. “On the other hand, if they manage to kill you, I'll give you the best send-off any funeral's

ever seen.”

“Let's crawl to the door,” he said.
“We'll be safer in the corridor.”

I didn't necessarily agree with that, since I didn't know who might be waiting in the corridor to greet us, but then another shot came through the window and we high-tailed it to the door and raced out of the room. The corridor was empty, and we decided that trying to leave the hotel wouldn't be the brightest course of action, since someone on the outside already knew we were there, so instead we climbed down to the third floor and found a real small broom closet without no windows.

“I'll wait here,” said MacDonald.
“You go down to the desk and have them

phone the police.”

That didn't have no more appeal to me than returning to the room to finish up the pastries.

“Maybe you'd better go, Brother Zachariah,” I said. “I don't speak Greek.”

“The desk clerk speaks English.”

“He'd probably be more inclined to believe a regular customer of good standing in the community,” I said.

“Justdo it!” he said, shoving me out into the corridor and locking the door behind me. Well, I couldn't see no point to standing out there all night, so I walked over to the elevator and pushed the button, and a minute later I was down on the main floor, walking over to the

desk, when a couple of well-dressed gentleman walked over and grabbed me by each arm and escorted me out the door and to a black car that was waiting at the curb. Then they frisked me and had me climb into the back seat between them.

“What is your name?” demanded the taller one, shoving a pistol into my short ribs.

“The Honorable Right Reverend Doctor Lucifer Jones at your service,” I said.

“I hope so,” he said.

“Just check my passport if you doubt me, Brother.”

“I meant that I hope you will be at our service,” he said. “What is your exact

relationship to Professor Zachariah MacDonald?”

“I'm kind of a paid traveling companion,” I said.

“Enough talk!” snapped the shorter man. “Has he found it?”

“Has who found what?” I asked.

“You know precisely what I'm talking about: has MacDonald found what he's been looking for?”

“Last I saw of him, he was mostly looking for a place to hide,” I said.

“Listen to me, Reverend Jones,” said the taller one. “I don't know what your involvement is, but whatever he's paying you, we'll triple it.”

“Let me get this straight,” I said. “He's paying me five thousand dollars to keep

him alive for a week. You're saying that you'll pay me fifteen thousand to keep him alive?"

"Don't play the fool with me, Reverend Jones!" said the taller man. "We'll pay you fifteen thousand to come over to our side."

"You want me to protect you from him?"

I think the tall guy was going to hit me with his gun, but the short one reached over and stopped him.

"What he means, Reverend Jones," he said, pronouncing each word real slow and careful-like, "is that we will pay you to keep us informed of Professor MacDonald's plans—and if you can tell us where Atlantis is before he stakes his

claim and makes the news public, we'll pay you a bonus of another fifteen thousand.”

“Well, that seems right generous,” I said. “But you got to promise me that you won't kill him.”

“Why not?” demanded the tall guy.

“He's paying me to keep him alive,” I explained. “That would be a breach of faith.”

“But telling us his plans isn't?” he asked, surprised.

“He just hired me to guard his body, not his secrets,” I said. “Have we got a deal?”

The two looked at each other, and then nodded.

“What are your names, and how do I

contact you?" I asked them.

"You may call us Mr. Tall and Mr. Short, and we'll contact you," said Mr. Short. "From this moment on, you'll never be out of our sight."

They opened the door and sent me back into the hotel. I didn't see much sense stopping at the broom closet to tell MacDonald that the coast was clear, since he was bound to ask why, and I figured he wouldn't see the situation quite the same way I did, so I went up to his room, finished off the baklava and a bottle of ouzo, and then sacked out in my own room right next door. When I woke up I checked the clock and saw it was about noontime, so I opened the connecting door to MacDonald's room to

see if he was ready to go to the bank yet, but he wasn't nowhere to be seen. I went down to the lobby looking for him, but although Mr. Tall and Mr. Short were there waiting for us, the desk clerk told me that MacDonald hadn't come down yet.

I figured the only place left that he could possibly be was the broom closet on the third floor, so I went up there to open it, and found it was still locked.

“Come on, Brother Zachariah!” I shouted, pounding away on the door. “It's almost noon. You can't stay in there forever.”

Well, I must have kept it up for a good ten minutes with no answer, and suddenly Mr. Tall and Mr. Short were

standing beside me, and finally Mr. Tall pulled out a little piece of wire and picked the lock and opened the door, and there was poor Zachariah MacDonald, sprawled out on the floor.

“Dead?” asked Mr. Short.

Mr. Tall felt for a pulse. “Definitely. It must have been all these ammonia fumes in a closed room.”

Which brought my one and only attempt at bodyguarding to a sorry end.

“Well, Doctor Jones,” said Mr. Short, “you're working exclusively for us now. We won't pay you the fifteen thousand for telling us the dear departed's plans, of course, but we'll pay you the other fifteen if you can figure out where Atlantis is.”

“In the meantime,” said Mr. Long, “let's carry poor Professor MacDonald up to his room so that he doesn't disturb the hotel guests, and we can go over his pockets and such without any untimely interruptions.”

Well, the three of us didn't have much trouble carting Brother Zachariah, who wasn't all that big or tall, up to his room, where Mr. Tall and Mr. Short stripped him down to the buff looking for clues.

“Damn!” said Mr. Tall when they were done. “There's nothing but his bank book—and now that he's dead, that won't do us any good.”

“Did he have any luggage, Reverend Jones?” asked Mr. Short.

“Not a thing,” I said. “He was

traveling just as light as I was.”

“Think, Reverend Jones!” said Mr. Tall. “Did he say anything, anything at all, that might give you a hint as to where Atlantis is?”

“Nothing. Just that it wasn't nowhere near Tinos, that he'd wasted a month there to throw you off the trail.”

“Did he tell you where he'd been before going to Tinos?”

“Not as I recall.”

“Then that son of a dog died with the secret intact!” said Mr. Tall.

“Hey, that's no way to speak of the dead,” I said. “Especially since he always spoke kindly of you.”

“He did?” said Mr. Short sharply. “I thought he held all competitors in

complete contempt. What did he say?"

"He allowed as to how you were pretty bright fellers."

"That hardly sounds like MacDonald," said Mr. Short.

"Maybe not," I said. "But he kept saying that you weren't no Cretins."

"That'sit!" screamed Mr. Short.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"He didn't say Cretin!" said Mr. Short. "He said Cretan! It was his way of having a little joke!"

"I don't follow you," I said.

"He found Atlantis off the coast of Crete!" exclaimed Mr. Short excitedly. "And when he said that we were not Cretans, he meant that we could never be expected to find it!"

“It makes sense,” agreed Mr. Tall, studying the bank book. “His bank has a branch on Crete, and that's where he made his last two transactions.”

“So all we have to do is buy the submerged land around Crete and we'll be rich beyond our wildest dreams!” said Mr. Short.

“Excuse me for interrupting,” I said, “but getting rich beyond my wildest dreams is one of my favorite conversational subjects. What has Atlantis got that makes it so valuable?”

“Artifacts from a civilization that existed a millennium before Christ!” said Mr. Tall. “Artifacts that no one has ever seen before. By the time we finish selling them to museums and collectors,

we can practically buy our own country!”

“What makes you think the government of Crete is gonna be real anxious to sell it to you?” I asked.

“They won't know they're selling us Atlantis,” said Mr. Short. “We'll merely buy dredging rights for a few miles in each direction.”

“I don't want to sound ungrateful or nothing,” I said, “but fifteen thousand dollars seems a small price to pay me for helping you becoming billionaires.”

“We're not through doing business with you yet, Reverend Jones,” said Mr. Tall.

“No?”

“Unfortunately, Mr. Short and I have

had certain ... ah ... technical disagreements with the authorities on Crete.”

“It's true,” added Mr. Short. “They would be most unhappy to see us show up there.”

“They might even ask how we came by the money we plan to use to purchase Atlantis,” chimed in Mr. Tall.

“In fact,” said Mr. Short, “there are probably fifty or sixty customers of the Bank of Crete who would be more than happy to tell them.”

“It's our own fault for leaving so many witnesses alive,” added Mr. Tall, “but how were we to know the bank would be that crowded?”

“We simply didn't have enough bullets

for them all,” explained Mr. Short. “It was most unprofessional of us, and I assure you it will never happen again.”

“But in the meantime,” concluded Mr. Tall, “it would probably be best if someone else were to purchase Atlantis—someone totally unknown to the Cretan authorities.”

“You're looking at him,” I said proudly. “I don't even know where Crete is.”

“Fine,” said Mr. Tall. “Then it appears that we will be able to do some more business, Reverend Jones.”

“I'm all ears,” I said.

“We don't know how much money it will take to purchase Atlantis, so we may have a momentary cash flow

problem,” said Mr. Short. “But if you will forego your fifteen thousand dollars now, we will give you five percent of everything we recover, which should come to considerably more. A thousandfold, at the very minimum.”

“Well, that's right generous of you gentlemen,” I said. “But if you will allow me an indiscreet question, how can I be sure you'll give me a fair accounting of what you owe me—not that I think for a single moment that you'd ever cheat a partner. View it as an academic question.”

Mr. Tall chuckled. “In point of fact, Dr. Jones, it's we who have to make sure that you don't cheat us. Everything will be registered in your name, so all the

revenues will come to you.”

“Now,” added Mr. Short, “can we be sure that you'll give us a fair accounting of what you owe us?”

“You ask that of a man of the cloth?” I said.

“We'd simply like to hear your reassurances.”

“Brother Short,” I said, “I wouldn't never cheat no partner. That's contrary to the Seventh and Twelfth Commandments.”

“Then we're in business,” said Mr. Tall. “Let's stop wasting time here and catch the next plane to Crete.”

“What about poor Brother MacDonald?” I asked. “Seems we ought to give him some kind of a sendoff, long

as he's the one who's making us all rich.”

“Well, we'd like to,” said Mr. Short uneasily. “But unfortunately, should the Athens police see us at his graveside, they might ask some embarrassing questions.”

“That ain't no problem,” I said. “I'll vouch that he died by accident.”

“Oh, they won't ask about Mr. MacDonald,” said Mr. Short. “Not at first, anyway.”

“But when they finish asking about the other seventeen misunderstandings, they might well want to know about poor Mr. MacDonald as well,” added Mr. Tall.

“Well, the Good Book teaches us to be adaptable, so why don't we all just observe a moment's silence right now?”

I suggested.

Which we did.

Then we went down to the black car, which was parked by the curb, and headed out to the airport, where we found that there weren't no scheduled flights to Crete for the next four days, so Mr. Tall chartered us a plane—leastwise, I think he chartered it, though the pilot didn't seem none too happy about the proceedings—and a few hours later we landed on Crete.

It was too late in the day to visit the government offices, so we spent the night in the El Greco Hotel, which took in tourists, roaches and rats with equal hospitality, and in the morning we headed on over to the Hereklion Public

Works building. Just before we got there, Mr. Small handed me a thick envelope and told me that it contained all the money he figured I'd need for dredging rights, and that he planned on getting a strict accounting the minute I came out.

Well, it took me a good hour and a half to get to the right department, and then another hour to make myself understood, but by noon I was the proud owner to the dredging rights to Atlantis for a mere thirty-two thousand dollars, which was two thousand more than was in the envelope, so I used my last two grand to cover it, and I walked back out carrying the certificate that made it all legal. Then we celebrated with lunch,

and in the afternoon Mr. Tall and Mr. Short hired a mighty impressive-looking boat and we all went out to pull a few rare pots and pans out of the ruins of Atlantis. We sent down half a dozen divers, all loaded with sacks and pouches to pull up their treasure. What they brung up was three sea shells and a blowfish.

“Where are the artifacts?” demanded Mr. Short.

“I keep telling you,” said the captain of the ship, “we have sailed this sea all our lives, and we have never seen a trace of this lost continent or city or whatever it is.”

“Maybe we're not looking in the right place,” said Mr. Tall. “Let's head

south.”

The captain shrugged. “It's your money.”

Well, we looked south and east and north and west. We looked right off the shore, and twenty miles out to sea, and eighty miles out to sea. We looked halfway to Italy and all the way back to Greece, but after a month we had to conclude that we had guessed wrong there wasn't no lost continent, or even a lost suburb, off the island of Crete.

“I suppose in every enterprise, there comes a time to pull up stakes and call it a day,” said Mr. Short while we were eating dinner at a little waterfrontaverna

“That's what happens when you put

your faith in an academic,” said Mr. Tall distastefully. “Obviously the late lamented Professor MacDonald really did mean Cretin, and now the secret of Atlantis has gone to the grave with him.”

“We’ll head back to the mainland tomorrow morning,” said Mr. Short.

“Since you guys are quitting and there ain’t no million dollars’ worth of old ashtrays and such to be dug up out of the sea,” I said, “what about my fifteen thousand dollars?”

“You stood to make a fortune if we had succeeded,” said Mr. Tall. “I see no reason why we should bear the brunt of our failure alone.”

“Well, at least give me five

thousand,” I said. “If you guys hadn't been after him, poor Brother Zachariah would have lasted out the week and I'd have earned my bodyguard money.”

“Nonsense,” said Mr. Short. “You're the legal owner of Atlantis, such as it is. Go sublease the dredging rights.”

“That'sit ?” I demanded. “You're just gonna get up and walk away?”

“Well, if you feel we've been unfair to you in any way, we could shoot you first,” suggested Mr. Tall. The conversation kind of flattened out and lay there like a dead fish after that, and the next morning Mr. Tall and Mr. Short were gone, leaving me with nothing but my last fifteen dollars and the ownership of a continent that was so lost nobody

could find it.

I figured I might as well head back to the mainland, too, but when I went to the airport I found out that I didn't have enough money to pay for a plane ticket, and they wouldn't extend me no credit even though I was a man of the cloth. Then I moseyed over to the docks, and discovered that there weren't any boats leaving for the next three days.

So since I was stuck there, I got to thinking about what Mr. Short had said about my being the legal owner of Atlantis, and suddenly the Lord hit me between the eyes with one of His better revelations, and I walked over to the telegraph office and got ahold of the biggest newspaper in Athens and spent

all but my last seventeen cents placing an ad.

I had given my address as the El Greco Hotel, so I spent my nights sleeping on a park bench and my days hanging around the lobby, and sure enough, in three days the money started pouring in, and within a week I'd made a quick forty-two thousand dollars and had barely scratched the surface of my potential market, and just when it seemed like me and God were finally gonna get our tabernacle, a bunch of Cretan police officers entered the El Greco's lobby and had a quick conversation with the desk clerk, who pointed to me, and a minute later I was being dragged, none too gently, to a

squad car, and a couple of minutes after that we pulled up at the police station and they escorted me into a room with a single chair and damp white walls.

“Is anyone gonna tell me what's going on?” I demanded. “I'm a peaceful law-abiding businessman what ain't been bothering no one, and suddenly you guys drag me off like I was some kind of undesirable or something.”

“You are Lucifer Jones, are you not?” said the captain of the squad.

“The Right Reverend Lucifer Jones,” I corrected him.

“The same Lucifer Jones who placed an advertisement last week in *The Daily Athenian* ?”

“Yeah, that's me.”

“I hate to think of how many laws you have broken, Reverend Jones,” said the captain. I pulled out my certificate of dredging rights. “I stand on the law,” I said. “I got every legal right to subdivide what I own and sell it off.”

“You do understand, do you not, that every square centimeter of land you own is under the water?”

“So what?”

“Then how can you possibly sell lots with, as the ad says, ‘a Mediterranean view’?”

“I didn't never say what angle the view was from,” I replied. “Caviar empire.” He shook his head. “I am afraid we will have to confiscate any money you have appropriated and return it to

the poor dupes who answered your advertisement,” he said. “And of course,” he added, taking my certificate away, “your dredging rights have been revoked.”

“Then give me my thirty-two thousand dollars and we'll call it square,” I said.

“Your fine comes to thirty-one thousand nine hundred dollars or fifteen years in jail,” he said calmly. “The choice is yours.”

Well, I growled and I grumbled, but finally I didn't have no choice but to pay the fine.

“Now give me my hundred dollars and let me out of here,” I said.

“First you must sign over all claims to dredging rights,” he said. “Then it will

be my pleasure to place you on a plane that is leaving for Rome in less than an hour.”

“Who do I sign the rights over to?” I asked, looking at the certificate. He frowned. “The Hereklion Public Works building is closed today. To facilitate matters, you can sign them over to me—Captain Hektor Papadoras—and I will conclude the paperwork tomorrow.”

I did what he said, and they put me on the plane—which cost sixty of the hundred dollars they owed me—and a few hours later I was in Rome, chastising my Silent Partner for turning His back on me just when things were going well for the two of us.

I ate something I hadn't never heard of

called a pizza pie for dinner, which I decided was okay for Italy but would never catch on in the States, and then I found a cheap hotel and took a room there. The next morning I picked up a newspaper and read a feature about how an enterprising Cretan policeman named Hektor Papadoras was selling private fishing concessions off the coast of his island. I gave my Silent Partner a serious talking-to, explained that He'd been falling down on the job and that I expected better of Him in the future, and then I set out afresh to make my fortune and bring His word to the degenerate heathen of the Roman Empire, or such portion of it as I could snugly fit in the Tabernacle of Saint Luke once it got

itself built.