

# THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

## PART 2 THE GATE OF ORPHEUS

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Based on the characters of  
**EDGAR P. JACOBS**

Original title: La malédiction des trente deniers tome 2

Original edition: © Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud – Lombard s.a.) 2010  
by Jean Van Hamme & Antoine Aubin

Colour work: Laurence Croix

Inking of the backgrounds on pages 1 to 29, and inking of pages 30 to 54: Etienne Schröder  
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English translation: © 2012 Cinebook Ltd

Translator: Jerome Saincantin  
Lettering and text layout: Imadjinn  
Printed in Spain by Just Colour Graphic

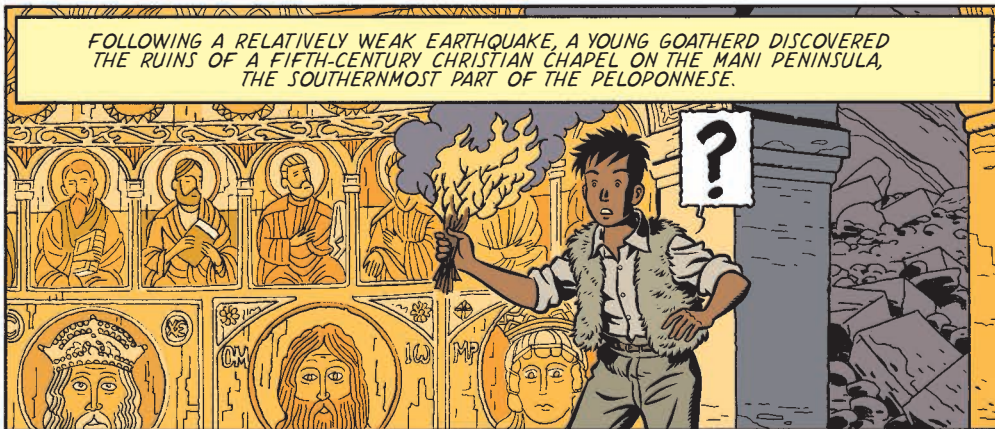
This edition first published in Great Britain in 2012 by  
Cinebook Ltd  
56 Beech Avenue  
Canterbury, Kent  
CT4 7TA  
[www.cinebook.com](http://www.cinebook.com)

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library

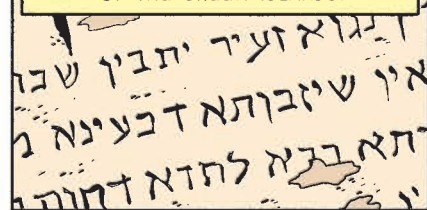
ISBN 978-1-84918-130-3



FOLLOWING A RELATIVELY WEAK EARTHQUAKE, A YOUNG GOATHERD DISCOVERED THE RUINS OF A FIFTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN CHAPEL ON THE MANI PENINSULA, THE SOUTHERNMOST PART OF THE PELOPONNESE.



INSIDE, IN ADDITION TO SOME MARVELLOUS FRESCOS, WAS A MANUSCRIPT FROM ONE NICODEMUS. WRITTEN IN ARAMAIC ON LEATHER SCROLLS, IT TOLD THE STORY OF A SMALL CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION'S FLIGHT AFTER THE BURNING OF ROME IN 64 AD, AND OF HOW ITS MEMBERS SETTLED ON ONE OF THE GREEK ISLANDS.



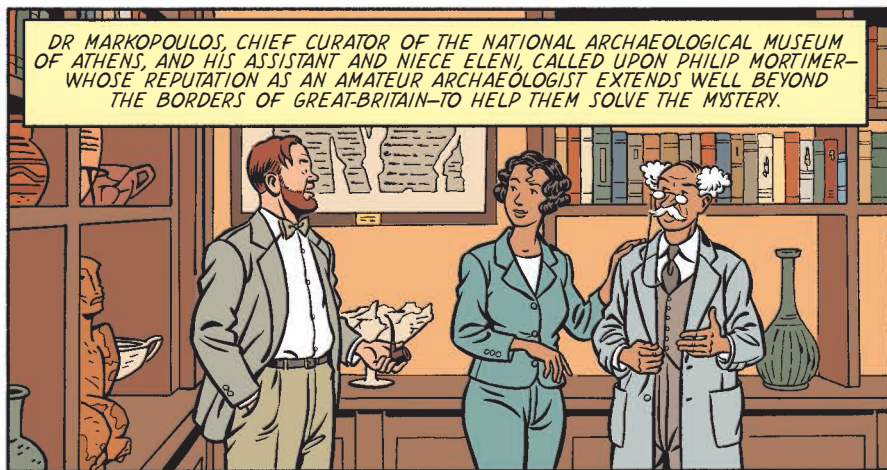
THERE WAS ALSO, WITHIN A LEAD RELIQUARY, A SILVER COIN BEARING THE PORTRAIT OF EMPEROR TIBERIUS. ACCORDING TO NICODEMUS'S WRITINGS, IT WAS ONE OF THE 30 DENARII GIVEN TO JUDAS ISCARIOT BY THE PRIESTS OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON FOR HANDING JESUS OVER TO THE ROMANS.



STILL ACCORDING TO THE MANUSCRIPT, THE RENEGADE APOSTLE'S ATTEMPT TO COMMIT SUICIDE HAD FAILED AND, AFTER WANDERING FOR A LONG TIME, HE HAD COME TO SPEND HIS LAST DAYS AMONG NICODEMUS'S COMMUNITY. HE WAS THEN BURIED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION WITH HIS REMAINING 29 PIECES OF SILVER.



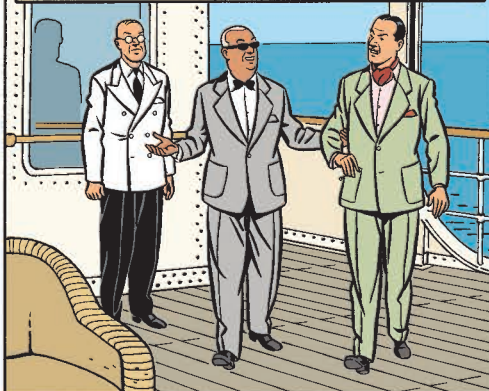
DR MARKOPOULOS, CHIEF CURATOR OF THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF ATHENS, AND HIS ASSISTANT AND NIECE ELENI, CALLED UPON PHILIP MORTIMER—WHOSE REPUTATION AS AN AMATEUR ARCHAEOLOGIST EXTENDS WELL BEYOND THE BORDERS OF GREAT-BRITAIN—TO HELP THEM SOLVE THE MYSTERY.



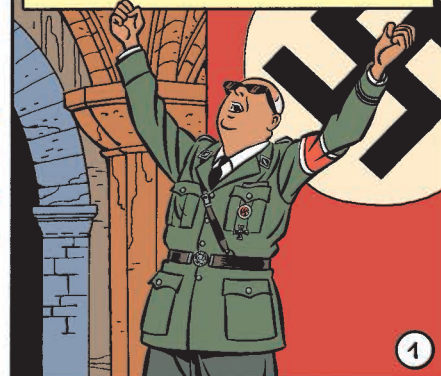
MEANWHILE, IN THE UNITED STATES, A MYSTERIOUS HELICOPTER-BORNE COMMANDO GROUP BROKE "COLONEL" OLRİK OUT OF THE PENITENTIARY WHERE HE'D BEEN SERVING HIS TIME SINCE THE BUSINESS WITH THE LOS ALAMOS ATOMIC BOMBS\*. THE ASSISTANCE OF CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, COMMANDER OF MIS, WAS REQUESTED BY HIS OLD FRIEND JOHN CALLOWAY, HEAD OF THE FBI'S OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON.



BUT OLRİK WAS ALREADY FAR AWAY, SAILING THE ATLANTIC ON BOARD THE ARAX. THE YACHT BELONGED TO BELOS BELUKIAN, A FABULOUSLY WEALTHY ARMENIAN BUSINESSMAN WHO'D HAD OLRİK FREED IN ORDER TO RECRUIT HIM. BELUKIAN WAS, IN FACT, COUNT RAINER VON STAHL, A FORMER SS OFFICER WHO VANISHED DURING THE COLLAPSE OF NAZI GERMANY IN 1945—AFTER APPROPRIATING THE NAZI WAR TREASURE THAT ADOLF HITLER HAD ORDERED HIM TO HIDE IN AUSTRIA.



VON STAHL'S GOAL WAS TO BE THE FIRST TO FIND JUDAS'S GRAVE AND TAKE THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER FOR HIMSELF. HE BELIEVED THEY WERE FILLED WITH AN EVIL POWER THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO RULE OVER THE WORLD. DESPITE A CERTAIN SCEPTICISM, OLRİK AGREED TO ENTER HIS SERVICE, AS MUCH OUT OF GREED AS BECAUSE THE PROSPECT OF ONCE AGAIN FACING HIS OLD ENEMY MORTIMER APPEALED TO HIM.



\*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.



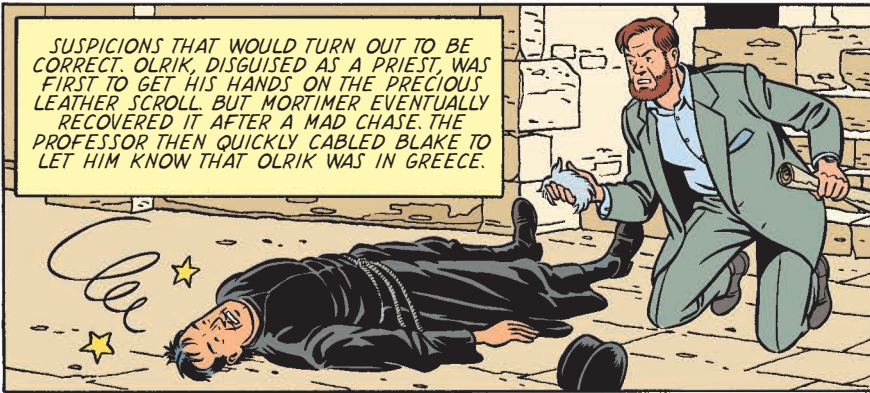
AFTER ESCAPING A KILLER IN ATHENS SENT BY VON STAHL, MORTIMER TRAVELLED TO THE MANI PENINSULA WITH ELENI AND HER AMERICAN FIANCE JIM RADCLIFF, A REPORTER WITH THE PHILADELPHIA CHRONICLE, THE NEWSPAPER THAT WAS FUNDING THEIR RESEARCH IN EXCHANGE FOR AN EXCLUSIVE ON THE STORY.



THEIR FIRST OBJECTIVE WAS TO FIND THE MISSING PART OF NICODEMUS'S MANUSCRIPT, WHICH WOULD GIVE THEM THE NAME OF THE ISLAND ON WHICH THE LITTLE COMMUNITY HAD FOUND REFUGE. MORTIMER SUSPECTED THE YOUNG GOATHERD OF KEEPING IT IN THE HOPES OF SELLING IT TO A COLLECTOR.



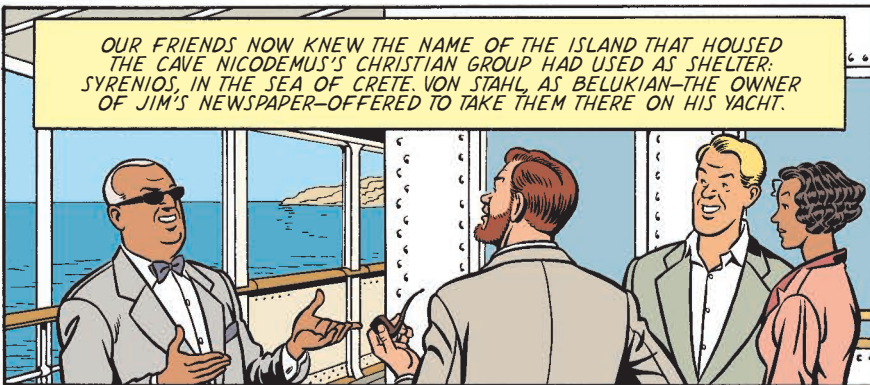
SUSPICIONS THAT WOULD TURN OUT TO BE CORRECT. OLRİK, DISGUISED AS A PRIEST, WAS FIRST TO GET HIS HANDS ON THE PRECIOUS LEATHER SCROLL, BUT MORTIMER EVENTUALLY RECOVERED IT AFTER A MAD CHASE. THE PROFESSOR THEN QUICKLY CABLED BLAKE TO LET HIM KNOW THAT OLRİK WAS IN GREECE.



THE TRIO ACCEPTED, THUS UNKNOWINGLY THROWING THEMSELVES INTO THE LION'S DEN. AND WHILE ELENI AND JIM WERE DRUGGED AND NEUTRALISED, MORTIMER FOUND HIMSELF A PRISONER IN THE COMPANY OF DR MARKOPOULOS, KIDNAPPED IN ATHENS BY THE GOONS OF THE FORMER SS STANDARTENFÜHRER.



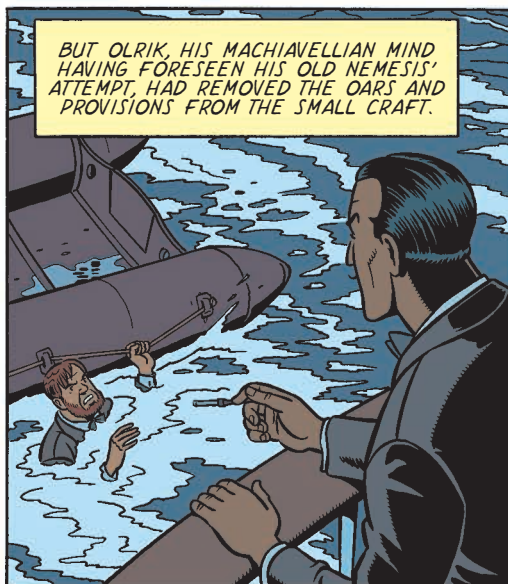
OUR FRIENDS NOW KNEW THE NAME OF THE ISLAND THAT HOUSED THE CAVE NICODEMUS'S CHRISTIAN GROUP HAD USED AS SHELTER: SYRENIOS, IN THE SEA OF CRETE. VON STAHL, AS BELUKIAN—THE OWNER OF JIM'S NEWSPAPER—OFFERED TO TAKE THEM THERE ON HIS YACHT.



HAVING MANAGED TO CUT HIS BONDS AND LEAVE THE CABIN, THE PROFESSOR ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE THE ARAX ABOARD A SMALL INFLATABLE LIFEBOAT.



BUT OLRİK, HIS MACHIAVELLIAN MIND HAVING FORESEEN HIS OLD NEMESIS' ATTEMPT, HAD REMOVED THE OARS AND PROVISIONS FROM THE SMALL CRAFT.

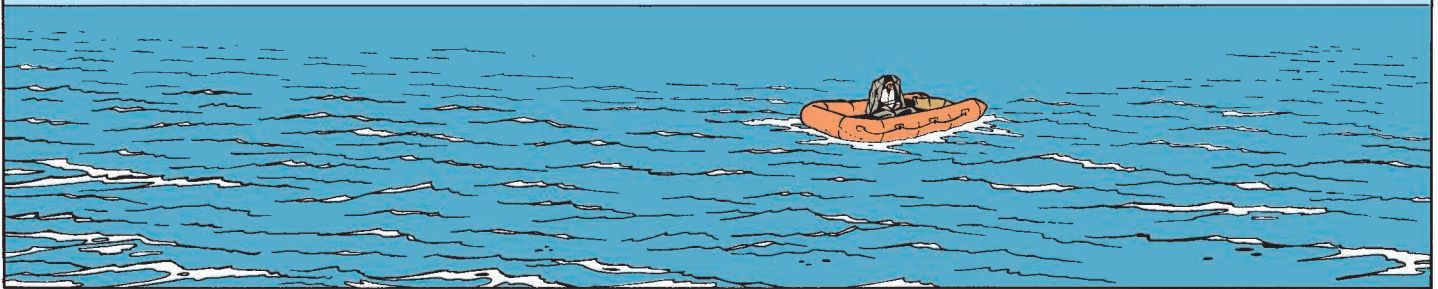


Away from all sea lanes as we are, you won't last long, Mortimer. Give my best to Poseidon! Ha! Ha! Ha!





AFTER THE NIGHT, AN INTERMINABLE DAY HAS GONE BY. NOT ONE SHIP, NOT EVEN THE TINIEST RAFT, HAS APPEARED ON THE HORIZON.

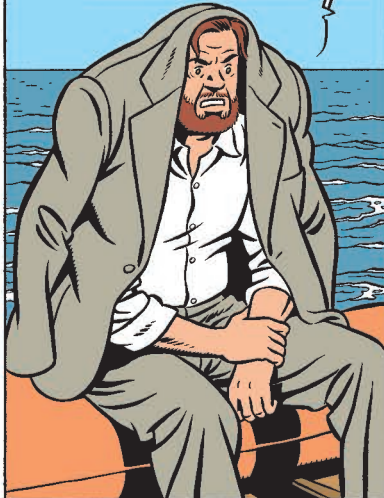


THEN COMES A SECOND NIGHT...



... AND A SECOND DAY UNDER A SCORCHING SUN. HIS LIPS CRACKED, TORMENTED BY AN UNBEARABLE THIRST, MORTIMER FEELS HOPE SEEPING AWAY FROM HIM.

That cursed Olrik was right: I won't make it another day.

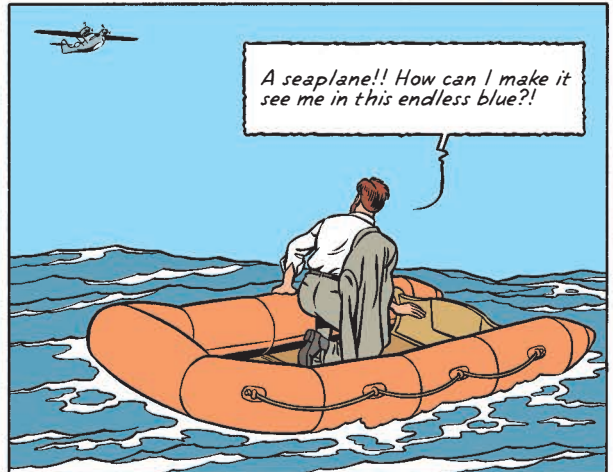


VRRRRR

?



A seaplane!! How can I make it see me in this endless blue?!



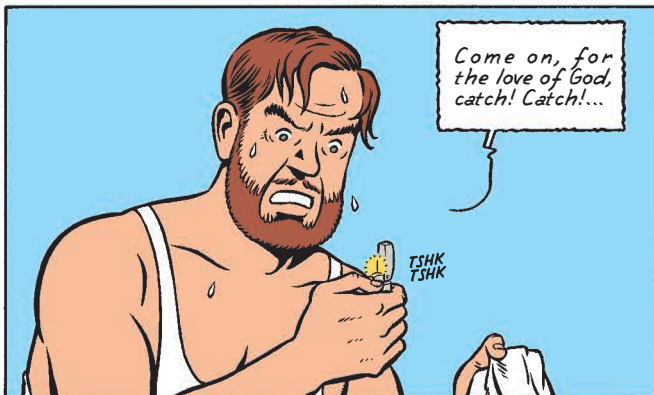
Smoke! I must make smoke! My shirt, my jacket... It should work!



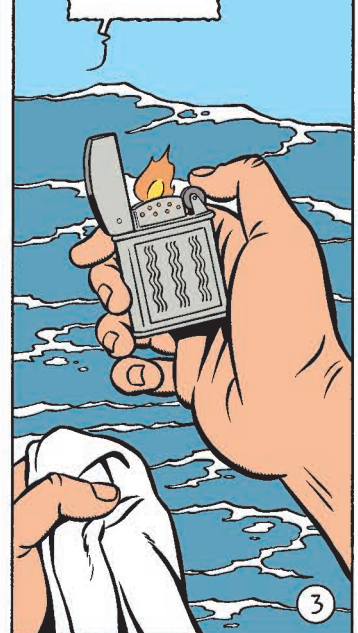
BUT THE PROFESSOR'S LIGHTER, SOAKED IN SEAWATER, REFUSES TO CATCH.



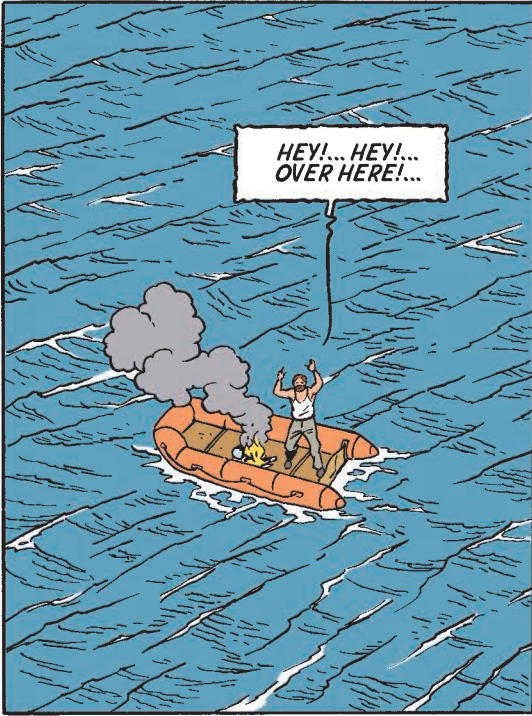
Come on, for the love of God, catch! Catch!...



At last!!...







HEY!... HEY!...  
OVER HERE!...

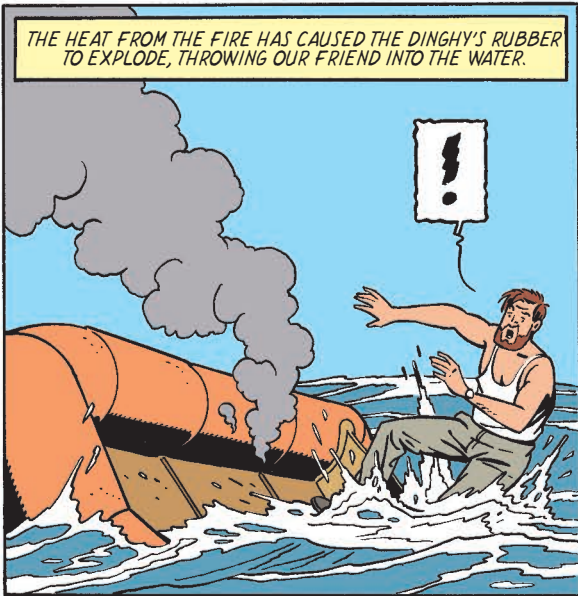


Oh, no! They didn't see me!



What the?!...

**BANG**



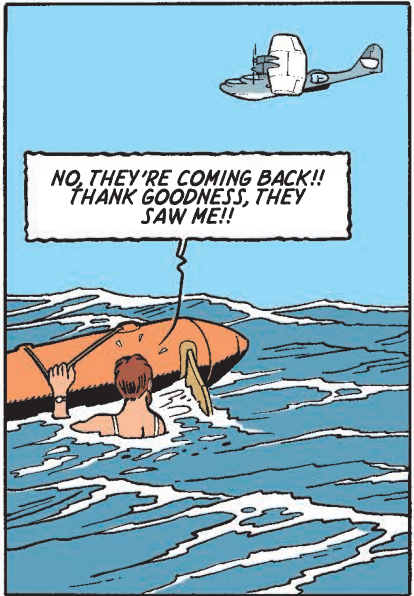
THE HEAT FROM THE FIRE HAS CAUSED THE DINGHY'S RUBBER TO EXPLODE, THROWING OUR FRIEND INTO THE WATER.

!

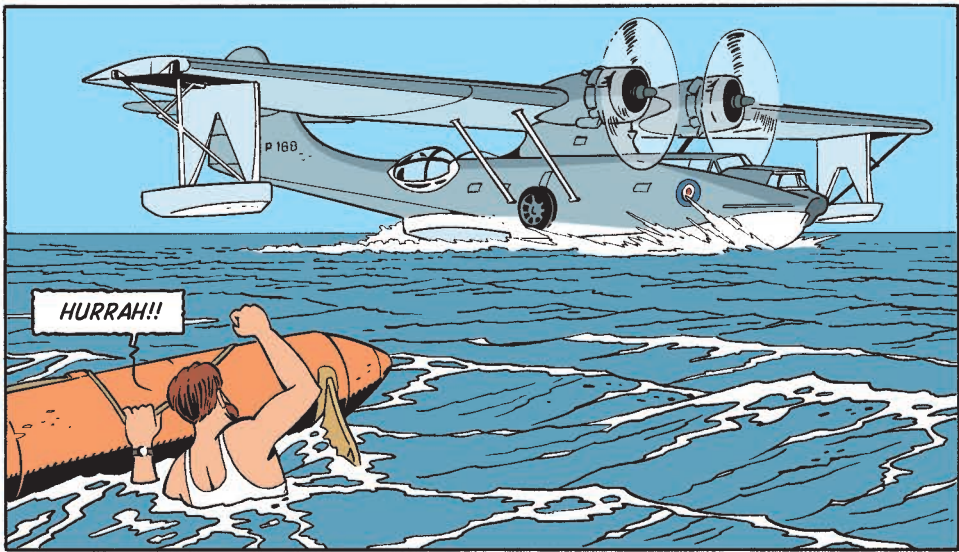


This time, Philip, old boy, it really is the end. All I can do now is...

**VRRRRR**



NO, THEY'RE COMING BACK!!  
THANK GOODNESS, THEY SAW ME!!



HURRAH!!



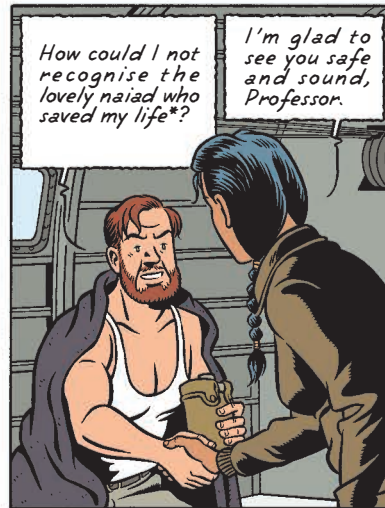
Hello, Philip! I say, old chap, what a novel way to travel!

BLAKE?!?





Don't drink too fast, old boy. You'll choke. I suppose you remember John Calloway and his deputy, Jessie Wingo?



How could I not recognise the lovely naiad who saved my life?

I'm glad to see you safe and sound, Professor.



But, by what miracle?...

There's no miracle, Philip. Just the lucky break of having spotted you. We're following the trail of one Belos Belukian, whose yacht was sighted in Greek waters by our agents.



We have good reason to believe that it was Belukian who broke Olrik out of the Jacksonville penitentiary.

Which your telegram informing me of Olrik's presence in the Peloponnese seems to confirm.

Olrik is, indeed, aboard the Arax.

AND WHILE THE SEAPLANE FLIES ON, MORTIMER RECOUNTS HIS TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS TO HIS COMPANIONS, WHO LISTEN INTENTLY.



Fantastic! I'll tell the pilot to make for the island of Syrenios.

If we find Olrik on his yacht, Belukian will answer for it to the American justice system.

Be careful. Besides Olrik and his three prisoners, Belukian also has half a dozen heavily-armed men on board.



We suspected as much. As you can see, we didn't come alone.

Your men, Calloway?



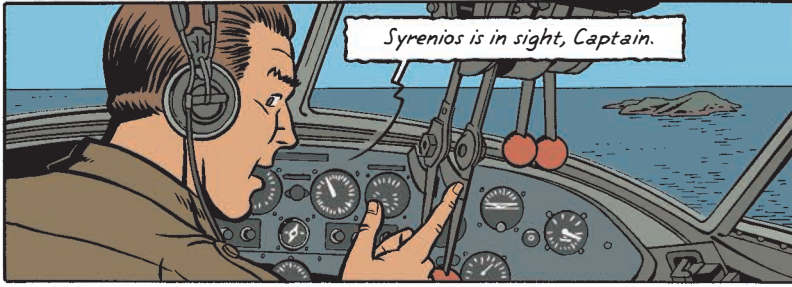
No. The FBI has no jurisdiction outside of US territory. These are elite commandos, all M16 agents.



As you probably know, Philip, the Intelligence Service has remained very active in Greece since the end of the civil war in '49. So, my colleagues at M16 lent me this Catalina seaplane and the help of one of their shock teams.

\*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.





Syrenios is in sight, Captain.



There! The Arax!



Perfect. Take us higher. No need to spook our quarry, should it be here.

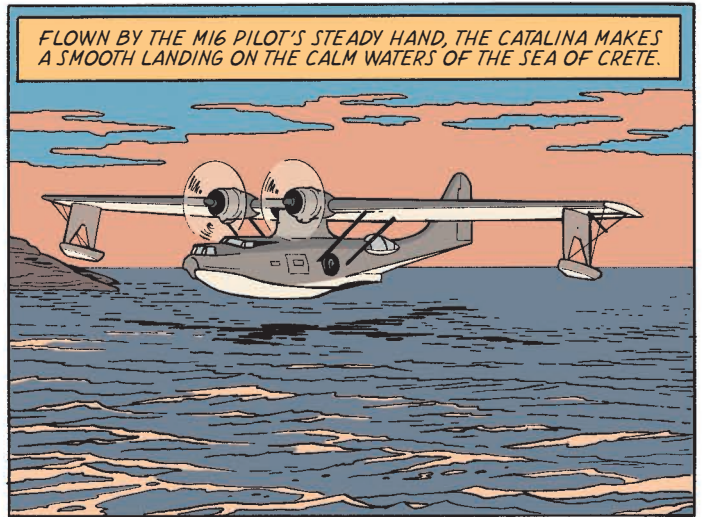


Don't overfly it.

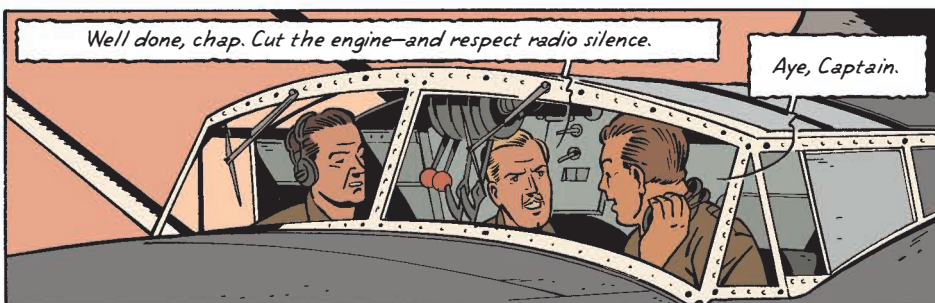


How do you plan to proceed?

We'll touch down a few miles away, out of sight of the yacht. There, we'll wait for night to fall completely.



FLOWN BY THE M16 PILOT'S STEADY HAND, THE CATALINA MAKES A SMOOTH LANDING ON THE CALM WATERS OF THE SEA OF CRETE.



Well done, chap. Cut the engine—and respect radio silence.

Aye, Captain.



AND WHILE THE MEN OF THE ASSAULT TEAM GET READY...

Why not have the Greek authorities intervene?

Too complicated. Too slow. Besides, we have no evidence of Belukian's guilt.



It's precisely such evidence that we must find on the Arax. So, this is a secret and completely illegal operation such as intelligence services the world over undertake.