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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JUNE, 1953

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THE STAR LORD

By Boyd Ellanby

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Title: Rub-a-Dub-Dub

Date of first publication: 1953

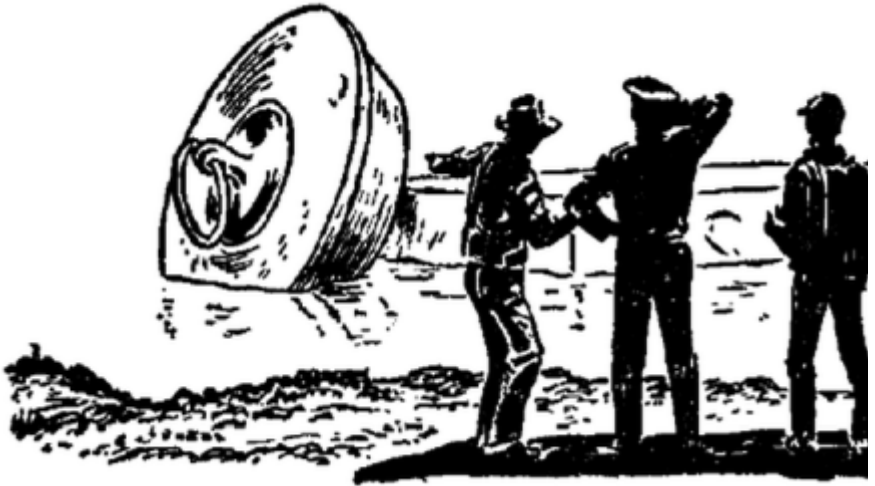
Author: Frank Richards (1883-1961)

Date first posted: November 9, 2022

Date last updated: November 9, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20221115

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Greg Weeks, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



RUB-A-DUB-DUB

By

Frank Richards

Ocean depths have always been mysterious to man, but Larabee found something positively incredible—after an atom bomb had exploded . . .

I WATCHED Dr. Larabee squeeze through the small opening into the shell of the bathysphere. Two members of the crew lifted the thick glass window into place and began twisting it tight.

We stood aboard the salvage ship Exeter somewhere near the Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific. I was here representing Alliance News Service to report exclusively to the world what Dr. Larabee, famed oceanographer, would find the effect of an atomic explosion had had beneath the surface of the sea.

We waited a long time for Larabee to announce that he had reached his planned depth. His voice reached all of us on deck through a loudspeaker

connected to his headphone. The first few reports, strangely metallic over the speaker, were routine enough.

“Five hundred—nothing unusual.”

“Seven hundred—everything fine.”

Then suddenly there was a gasp. We waited tensely for a signal to raise the sphere, not knowing what sort of trouble he might be in. Then his voice broke into our anxiety, matter-of-factly giving instructions which only served to arouse our curiosity.

“I’m taking pictures—move me in the direction I indicate.”

Following the doctor’s orders the ship described a large circle about three miles in circumference. When we’d returned to our approximate starting point the doctor asked to be hauled up.

It seemed an interminable time before the sphere broke the surface, was brought aboard, and Larabee emerged. There was an odd expression on his face.

“What did you find, sir?” I asked.

He didn’t answer, just shook his head.

“Let’s get back, fast,” he told the skipper. Turning to one of his assistants he added, “Take damn good care of the cameras. I’m not saying a thing,” he looked at me as he said this, “until those films are developed and you can see for yourself.” He meant it, too. He was silent during the entire trip back.

By themselves, the pictures were meaningless. Larabee suggested it was a matter of perspective, because the thing was so large. He sent for an artist who, after looking at the strange prints, made a rough sketch of the object several thousand times reduced.

There were only four of us there to look at the drawing when it was completed—the artist, Larabee, a naval intelligence officer, and myself.

“Here it is,” said the artist, completing the sketch, “but would someone kindly tell me what I’ve drawn?”

Larabee turned to the officer. “What do you think?” Intelligence, for once, was at a loss. The lieutenant shook his head.

I couldn’t repress the laugh. “Looks to me like a bathtub stopper!”

The others stared at the sketch again, then grinned. It certainly did—a monstrous, old-fashioned bathtub stopper, plugged into a huge drain.

IT made terrific headlines. “The Stopper” was on everyone’s lips—the way flying saucers and flashing balls of fire had been. For follow-up stories we

got eminent men to speculate on the nature of “The Stopper,” and received explanations ranging from curiously formed rock strata to doubts as to the veracity of the whole expedition’s staff. But the idea that the vast Pacific Ocean was contained by a bathtub stopper caught and tickled people’s fancies, and for awhile the world just relaxed and chuckled.

We’d broken the news on Saturday. The following Thursday the wires flashed word that one of the planes of the carrier Franklin had sighted a large iceberg-like object floating in the Southwest Pacific—where the currents are warm and icebergs practically unheard of.

I was present, along with other reporters, on the destroyer that went out from Wake to investigate. As we came within sight of it, a sickeningly sweet smell reached us. It grew stronger as we approached, but that wasn’t what bothered us. If this were an iceberg, it was the largest one ever reported. And it was also the first one that looked absolutely rectangular.

A launch was put over the side and several men carved chunks from the object. We took them back for chemical analysis, knowing beforehand it was no iceberg. Ice melts in warm hands, and isn’t perfumed.

We’d flashed preliminary reports directly from the destroyer, and sent pictures of the object in rapid succession. The world waited for the chemical report. It didn’t take long.

“It’s soap,” was the terse comment of the chemist when he let us into the lab. “Ordinary, perfumed bath soap—nothing more or less.”

* * *

And that’s all there is.

Sunk at the bottom of the Pacific is a bathtub stopper about three miles in circumference, and nearby floats a bar of soap about seven miles long and five wide.

Thursday we discovered the soap, and now it’s Saturday again.

We’re waiting.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Story published in the magazine “Imagination: Stories of Science and Fantasy”, June 1953, Vol. 4, No. 5, edited by Wm. L. Hamling.

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Rub-a-Dub-Dub* by Frank Richards]