

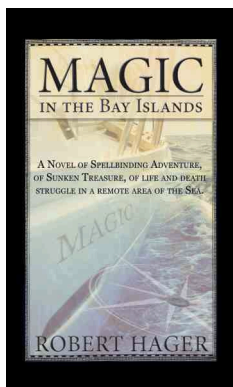
MAGIC

IN THE BAY ISLANDS

A NOVEL OF SPELLBINDING ADVENTURE,
OF SUNKEN TREASURE, OF LIFE AND DEATH
STRUGGLE IN A REMOTE AREA OF THE SEA.



ROBERT HAGER



A dream-like adventure of an American couple on a beautiful sailing yacht in the Caribbean Sea changes from idealistic to terror with amazing speed. They find fabulous treasure on the ocean floor, covered by a thin layer of sand. To keep the treasure, or even their lives, would require magic and more...

Magic in the Bay Islands

by

Robert Hager

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](http://booklocker.com)

<http://booklocker.com/books/7780.html>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

YOUR FREE EXCERPT APPEARS BELOW. ENJOY!

MAGIC IN THE BAY ISLANDS

Robert Hager

Copyright © 2014 Robert Hager

ISBN 978-1-63490-006-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2014

First Edition

Cover Design By Brian Olson
AlphaGraphics Tacoma
www.alphagraphics Tacoma.com

CHAPTER 8

After a person spends considerable time on a vessel, he becomes attuned to the moods of the ship, geared to the change in weather. Having spent a lot of time on my yacht, I was awakened by the boat tugging on its anchor. I glanced at my watch's luminous dial. One-thirty. I arose and stepped up into the pilot house. I could see the rain slanting down in sheets through the narrow slits of the rain shutter as the northeasterly wind howled a mournful tune through the top rigging. Magic had her anchor chain pulled taut and had swung around—bow to the wind and stern to seaward. Gazing at the wind vane indicator on the bulkhead, I could see the gauge playing back and forth between forty-five and fifty-five knots with frequent gusts.

I sat at the chart table and tuned the single-sideband to one of the all-weather channels for marine weather out of Miami. The reception was good despite the high hills of Roatan that were now in front of us. The station went through the weather for this hemisphere, quadrant by quadrant, until they finally reached that section of the Caribbean, about sixteen degrees latitude. Though the forecast was not good, I had heard a lot worse in days gone by. We were in the grip of a mild norther and small craft advisories were in effect for our area. The sea was expected to be fifteen to twenty feet with winds to fifty-five knots out of the north, northeast, with higher winds in the squall area.

Locally, heavy rains were forecast. I flipped the radio off and watched the rain coming through the shutters. *They were right on the button there*, I thought. I thanked my lucky stars that we had decided to stop in the sheltered bay. If we had been at sea that night, we would have had a rough ride, but in this weather, we could not have found a better place to hole up. I took one last look through the shutters and crept back to bed. Tobi and her pets were sleeping peacefully.

At seven-thirty the next morning, the smell of coffee brewing and the clatter of dishes from the galley brought me from my slumber.

“Wake up, Sleepy Head,” she called from the gallery. “It’s a yucky day outside, but I’m in a good mood and lonesome. Get up and keep me company, and I’ll feed you a good breakfast.”

Liking the sound of that deal, I threw myself out of my bunk and into a pair of shorts. Slipping on my topsiders, I ducked into the galley and gave Tobi a kiss.

“Go on up and have a seat. The table’s set and breakfast will be served in five minutes.”

As we sat enjoying our breakfast, Tobi inquired as to the Captain’s agenda for the day. Raising the rain shutters on the starboard window, I stared out through the cut to the sea. The wind had slackened during the early morning, but was still out of the northeast at a respectable twenty knots, leaving the waves at a monstrous level. They were pounding the reef and the three rocky cays with tremendous force. The salt spray drifted forty feet above the entrance to Port Royal. Though the rain had played itself out, a light drizzle

continued to fall with an overcast sky. Tobi had described it perfectly—a yucky day.

“Well, I don’t know of anything important for today. I’m just glad we were anchored here instead of getting our brains beaten out on the open sea.”

“When do you think we can do any diving?”

“Probably not for at least two days. The sea will stay up awhile after this blow. We can catch the marine weather on the radio, then I want to do some more calculations on the tide tables here and around the Bahama Bank. So you can either help me on the calculations, read or watch a video, or just be lazy.”

“I hope the rain stops,” she said.

“If it does, we’ll let the Avon down and poke around the edge of the bay. Maybe even see if anything’s left of the marina the boating couple started.”

“Good. I’d like to get out and I know Coco and Peanut could use some time ashore. As long as there are no people or other dogs they could run and play awhile.”

While Tobi cleared the remains of breakfast, I located the large scale chart of the area and my marine almanac and started working on the tide changes for that latitude. On her way back down to the galley, Tobi adjusted the dial on the radio. The marine weather broadcast was loud and clear. The norther and related squalls were reported to have moved to the west. Small-craft advisories remained in effect due to high seas. I realized the worst was over and the sea would return to three to five feet in a couple of days. We would

probably be able to do some diving on the outside of the reef by then.

I toyed with the tide calculations for the majority of the morning until I had the times and flow committed to memory. Tobi stuck around until she became bored, then she retired downstairs with a book. It was almost noon before the rain ceased, but dark clouds filled the sky and continued to drift across the horizon, leaving it overcast with no sign of the sun.

“How about lunch, Captain?” she asked, returning to the pilot house from below.

“Sounds good to me. I’m finished calculating, and, if my theory’s right, we should be able to do our underwater exploring from early morning until about two in the afternoon. The tide starts to run about two forty-five, and any underwater turbulence created by the falling tide would begin around then. I think we’ll be okay, as long as we give ourselves at least an hour before then for a good safe margin.”

“Okay. Now all we have to worry about is the sea going down and the weather clearing up before the puppies and I get cabin fever. I hope you like sandwiches, because soup and sandwiches are all that’s on the menu on rainy days.” Her tone allowed for no disagreement.

“That’s fine with me.”

“Now that that’s settled, would you mind letting the launch down after lunch? I’d like to go ashore with the dogs and let them run and play awhile.”

By one-thirty, the whole family was seated in the little rubber Avon and headed for the strip of white

sandy beach towards the rear of the bay. In a few minutes, we were dragging the launch onto the smooth sand.

Coco and Peanut, anxious to be about their business of exploring were first ashore. Walking hand in hand up the beach, Tobi and I allowed the dogs to run ahead of us. As Coco and Peanut reached the edge of the timber that surrounded the beach, they began to bark furiously at something that excited them. Concerned, Tobi and I broke into a trot until we came to the edge of the foliage and could see what was causing their excitement. The canines had managed to corner an iguana lizard about three feet long and it was a Mexican stand-off. The dogs didn't quite know what to do about the giant lizard, and the cornered creature was in the same situation. He couldn't quite comprehend the noisy little strangers invading his turf and creating such a ruckus.

Tobi and I laughed in relief and managed to call the dogs off while the lizard hurried deeper into the foliage with a relieved demeanor. Jumping and scampering around us, the puppies wanted praise for their discovery and bravery. We petted and bragged on them until the dogs were anxious to be off again.

At the far edge of the beach, we could see a sort of wooden structure protruding into the water. It had weathered until it was the same color as the trees and bushes in the background.

"Look, I bet that's the end of the dock that the boating couple built. Let's go see. Want to?" Tobi asked.

“Sure, we may as well have a look—the dogs are nearly there already.” A little farther up the beach, Tobi and I easily identified the dock. It appeared solid and was connected to a building surrounded by brush and foliage that had crept around attempting to reclaim what was once theirs. We approached the end of the dock. Well-made of heavy timber, it had been treated with a type of petroleum product to give it a dark brown, almost black, appearance. I noticed the cross-braces had been drilled and connected with galvanized bolts. A lot of effort had been spent to construct this dock. The builders had intended for it to last many years.

We climbed upon the dock end from our edge of the beach. About four feet above ground level, it led to a large thirty foot by thirty foot structure that was made of the same treated wood as the dock, making it almost invisible against the dark shaded background and heavy foliage of the surrounding area. Several large openings were apparently meant to be windows, but hadn't received any glass or it had been taken by the ravage of time.

We looked through the large opening in front. Against the wall, a wooden stairway led up to a half-loft. Evidence of animal use was abundant throughout the building. We could see our small dogs rummaging around inside, investigating everything.

“Not much left to see. Kinda sad. That couple must have worked hard to make their private dream come true. It's a shame it was stamped out in such tragic manner,” Tobi said. “I can almost see the harbor full of

cruising yachts and boaters stopping here for a few days in their wanderings.”

“Yeah, it’s strange how one event can alter the course of things so drastically. Just think, if it hadn’t been for the tragic end met by the couple building this place, how different it would be today.”

“I see what you mean.”

“But in a few short years the bush will have completely reclaimed this place. There will be no sign of their having passed this place. Let’s go back to the launch,” she said.

“I get a sad feeling here. It’s as if I can feel the force of the wasted dreams.”

“Okay. I’m ready. Not much left to see anyway and the dogs have finished their exploration.”

As I finished my statement, the dogs began making barking, growling, and excited exploring sounds near the back of the now deserted, unfinished building. I called to them to quiet themselves and come on. They only increased the volume of the racket.

I said, “We’d better see what has them so worked up.” We headed deeper into the building, angling toward the back corner where the dogs were still in full voice. We could see evidence of some recent visitors. There was an area where soil had been dumped on the wood flooring. Small stones strewn about created a crude insulation between the floor and a rustic fire pit lined with stones. This was certainly created by humans. There was a circle of larger stones ringing it, with evidence of a fire having burned in the stone circle in the not-too-distant past. We looked at each other and

began looking around. There were several rum bottles strewn around the area.

Tobi said, "Hmm, maybe a wild party we missed?"

I picked up a small stick about five inches long and began raking something out of the trash litter. On closer examination, we saw it was a chicken with the head missing. It was only a dead chicken, but it sure excited the dogs, and I could feel goose bumps begin to tickle my body.

Tobi suddenly said, "Jim, look here." She was holding a metal can that had been fashioned crudely into a cup.

I looked inside the cup and found what appeared to be dried blood. I touched it lightly with my finger and a deep rust colored film transferred to my finger from the cup. We looked at each other wide eyed and Tobi said, "Remind you of another place?"

I answered softly, "Haiti. Voodoo." It brought back memories of the island nation we had spent time on while studying the national religion of Haiti years before.

Tobi said, "It gives me a feeling of unease. Headless chicken, rum, blood rituals, spells, and superstition. I believe there is a similar belief called 'Santeria' in the islands that has blood rituals and sacrifice as part of their beliefs."

I said, "Even our private cove may not be as private as we had thought."

Tobi replied, "Let's get out of here and back aboard Magic where we don't feel spooked or violated and talk about this over a stiff drink."

We made our way back to the beach and the launch. Though there was still an overcast sky, the wind had slackened even further to a moderate breeze. But glancing past where Magic was anchored to the entrance of Port Royal Harbor, it was evident that the sea was still plenty rough. As we pushed the Avon into the water, we could see the waves rolling in and crashing on Fowler reef, casting a heavy spray towards the heavens.

Coco and Peanut, anxious to return, had been the first aboard the Avon. I stood in knee-deep water, holding it steady until Tobi climbed aboard and seated herself. I hoisted myself inside and started the little Yamaha engine and headed back to Magic.

Once back aboard Magic, I decided to haul the Avon back up on the davits, the memory of the cut rope and lost whaler still fresh on my mind. Checking the anchor and taking a look around the yacht, I could find nothing that demanded my attention, so I made my way aft where Tobi and the dogs made a welcome sight. She was seated next to the large varnished wheel with her small amber Pomeranian on one side, watching her and me alternatively, intuitively as if waiting for a command. Her champagne-colored toy poodle waited on her other flank in the same posture and attitude. Even though both dogs were very small, they had as much of the protective determination toward Tobi as that of the fiercest breed you could name.

“I sure have a fine crew aboard,” I said, smiling my approval. “The yacht looks ship-shape to me, so maybe we could all reward ourselves with a nap.”

“I’m ready, Captain,” she said, leading the way below.

She loaded a tape with a good soothing beat by the Judds on the tape-deck and kept the volume low while everyone stretched out on our bunks for a much-needed rest. With Tobi on the starboard couch with her snuggling companions and I on the portside couch, it didn’t take long for the beat of the music and the pounding of sea on the reef in the background to lull everyone into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER 15

I stared incredulously at the piece of metal Tobi held in her gloved hand. Only gold holds its former brilliance in sea water and resists all marine growth. I could feel her excitement and I was feeling such a rush of adrenaline that I wanted to drop my light and join her at the crater. But I disciplined myself to hold fast and stretched out my hand for her to hand me the gold disk. It was a large gold coin. I couldn't tell much else about it in this environment, but I was sure that it was very old. Tobi broke in on my contemplation by waving her hand excitably in front of the light beam and proudly displaying another coin. She slipped this one into her vest pocket and smoothed the Velcro fasteners, securing the pocket, and returned to the crater in the cave face like a gopher to its hole.

I watched her, mesmerized, as she sorted through the debris in the hole. After a few minutes of this, she glanced back at me and indicated another pocket just to her left and about two feet farther up the wall, just at the edge of our light pattern. I looked at my watch and gave her a negative shake of the head. We had been down about 40 minutes so far and I wanted to give us plenty of time to get out of the cave and back to the surface. We needed to spend about 10 minutes around the 30-foot level on our ascent for safety's sake. We weren't really working deep enough for pressure to be a real problem, but I wanted to play it safe. Tobi gave me

a reluctant shrug and pulled her light back to her by its retaining cord. I signaled for her to lead off and I would follow her out and back to the surface.

We retraced our way back out of the cave to open water at the cliff face and headed up. We stopped at 30 feet for a few minutes and I could tell she was bursting with excitement and impatient to return to the surface to discuss her find. In all our years of diving, this was the first time we had found any gold. After a few minutes she pointed up. I nodded my head in agreement and we made for the surface.

We broke the surface again on the east side of the channel and Tobi spit out her mouth piece and yelled, "Whoopee! Whoopee!" She tried to give me a hug but was not quite able to pull it off with both our buoyancy vests in between.

She said, "Let's get our spare air. I want to get back to my cave."

We headed back to our rock for the spare bottles. I was eager as Tobi to get back down there. When we made the rocky cay I decided to retrieve the Avon this time and take it to the outside where we had surfaced earlier. The sea was so smooth now that I could anchor the launch in shallow water well out from the rocky reef where it broke the water with little fear of damage. With the sea this calm, we would have little trouble diving from the Avon. We gathered up all our things and stored them in the Avon, then headed around the cay for the channel leading out of Port Royal Harbor towards the open sea.

Tobi was a sight to see. She was all smiles and looked like she had just won the ten million dollar lottery, and it dawned on me that maybe she had.

We took the Avon through the channel and turned left, going to a spot near where we had surfaced a short while before. The water there was only about five feet deep and shoaled up fast to expose the rocky reef. I kept the launch out far enough that I didn't think the swells could carry it onto the rocks. Here I threw out our small five-pound anchor and reminded myself to be sure and check that it was in good holding when I went over the side.

Tobi and I busied ourselves changing our air tanks and preparing ourselves for another hour in our underwater cave. We were soon finished and ready to get underway again.

She said, "I've got about a million things to tell you and a million more questions to ask, but will have to save them for tonight. I'm too excited to talk right now anyway."

I smiled and said, "Likewise. But let's don't get careless in our excitement. This is what we have been dreaming about for years and I want it to have a happy ending."

"No sweat, Captain. Let's go."

We sat on the inflated rubber edge of the launch facing in and just fell over backwards into the Caribbean. Once in the water I looked around the bottom for our small Danforth anchor and saw it firmly hooked under the edge of a small coral head. This satisfied me that the launch wouldn't go anywhere in

our absence. I looked around at Tobi and she signaled for me to lead us back down. I started for the edge of the cliff and pointed my high-powered light straight down.

In minutes, we were back over our underwater plateau and only a few yards from the cave mouth. As we headed for the entrance, we paused only a moment to look at one another and reentered the cave side by side. I turned on the power to my light once again and headed to the rear of the cave room.

It dawned on me again that maybe my theory of these caves connecting with the blue holes on the banks wasn't so far-fetched after all. At least this cave didn't end here and it had turned in the general direction of the bank when it turned back northeast. I cautioned myself to pay attention and think of these things later.

We were back at the rocky face again where Tobi had found her cache of coins earlier. She pointed to another crater up slightly higher on the wall. I signaled her to go ahead and positioned the light to her best advantage. She allowed her light to float free on its retaining cord and peered into the other pocket. I couldn't see much of what she was doing, but she was in her gopher position again clinging to the rock face and digging in the sand and debris that was trapped in the pocket.

After only a few minutes she turned toward me and flashed yet another coin in my direction before squirreling it away in her vest and returning to her digging. We went from crater to crater in this manner, digging and searching each pocket or crater within

reach that caught her eye, all located at the cave's end where it took a sharp right turn and narrowed again. I held the light and Tobi did all the searching and directing from one hole to another. It seemed only minutes since we had returned, but my watch said differently. It was now a few minutes past one, and we were going to have to start for the surface again.

I signaled Tobi to shut down her digging and catch up her light. I wanted to have a quick look down the tunnel before leaving. Tobi back by my side, I turned my light around and headed for the tunnel leading off the room. We entered cautiously and saw it was similar to the cave entrance. We swam only 40 feet or so along this tunnel and realized it was going deeper. I glanced at the depth gauge fastened to my vest and noted that we had descended another 15 feet in depth while progressing northeast for another 40 feet.

Satisfied that this tunnel went somewhere and showed no signs of ending, I signaled Tobi we had gone far enough. Here again there was no sand or debris in this tunnel. It was swept clean. All the sand and pebbles were trapped in the crater and face of the cave room. We had enough room to turn around, so we worked our way back to the large underwater room.

Just as we entered the next room, my light picked up two bright red sapphire points of light and a big dark shape. My heart skipped a beat and I threw out my left hand for Tobi not to pass me. I studied the dark shape and sapphire eyes very carefully and eased my way forward very slowly. I knew that there was a sea creature of impressive proportions between us and open

water, and we didn't even have a spear gun. I had a large, stainless steel diving knife, razor sharp, strapped to my right thigh, but I knew it would be nearly useless against this brute.

I eased a few more feet toward this monster and it stared straight at the light as if hypnotized. We had to get out of there soon or we were going to have to sprout gills. Our air bottles were getting near the critical stage. With no other choice, I kept going slowly toward this monster, hoping against hope that we would be able to swim by it and knowing damn well we wouldn't be able to.

Then the monster began to take shape. It was about 12 to 14 feet long. Judging by the torpedo shape and smooth graceful lines, with two sharp side fins coming to a sharp triangular point and large dorsal fin on its center back, I knew it to be a shark and a damn big one. *Ah fuck, Jim. What a way to go. Dinner for a fucking shark off a little known reef in a remote part of the Caribbean.*

Tobi was by my side and I knew I would never give up the life of this woman or our life together without giving it my all. I reached down and pulled the rubber restraining loop over the hilt of my diving knife and eased it from its hard plastic scabbard. It is one fearsome knife, about 16 inches long at the blade and honed to razor sharpness.

I motioned for Tobi to switch on her light and I pointed for her to try to go past this guy on the left side. I was going to try to keep myself between the shark and her and maybe get my knife in a vital spot as soon as

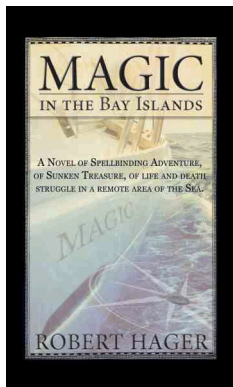
we were close enough. But I knew my chance of doing this was very slim. I knew they did it in the movies sometimes, but looking at this huge guy I sure didn't see how.

As we eased forward, closing the distance between us and the shark, I was able to pick out his features and I wanted to laugh. We were only a few feet from him now and I could see his slightly open mouth. He had a wide mouth and a flat head like some giant fresh water catfish. He was a shark all right. You couldn't mistake that sleek body, but he didn't have a tooth in his head, only a rough surface like course sandpaper for grinding its food.

I was staring at the largest nurse shark I had ever seen. He had apparently entered looking for his usual diet of lobster or maybe just out of curiosity. I knew him to be completely harmless and wanted to laugh. I looked at Tobi, who was still wide eyed and petrified and saw that she too had her diving knife in hand. Not as impressive as mine but she was obviously ready to do battle at my side.

I put my knife away and motioned for her to do the same and she looked at me like I had lost my mind. She made no move to replace her knife. I turned my light on the nurse shark and headed towards him. He made a flick of his tail and was past me in a blur, going deep into the cave we were just leaving.

As he went by us, the turbulence was like the vortex from a 747, and it almost flipped me head over heels. I would have lost my light if it hadn't been fastened to me.



A dream-like adventure of an American couple on a beautiful sailing yacht in the Caribbean Sea changes from idealistic to terror with amazing speed. They find fabulous treasure on the ocean floor, covered by a thin layer of sand. To keep the treasure, or even their lives, would require magic and more...

Magic in the Bay Islands

by

Robert Hager

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](http://booklocker.com)

<http://booklocker.com/books/7780.html>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

I soon recovered and saw Tobi. She had lost her grip on her knife and it was gleaming on the smooth floor of the cave. Unfortunately, it would have to stay there for now. We were getting dangerously low on oxygen.

She was still wide eyed and wondering what in the hell was going on. I didn't waste any more time. I motioned for her to follow and made for open water outside the tunnel. We were just in front of the cave when my air gave out, and I reached down and pulled the J-valve lever to give me 10 minutes reserve.

I glanced at Tobi and she pointed up. We made for the surface not far from our launch. It was still in place, bobbing us welcome in the small sea swells.

I spit out my regulator and asked, "Are you okay, Tobi?"

"I may have peed my pants, but it doesn't matter here. What in the hell happened down there?"