

Hunter's Secret

Wreck of the
Carol K

J. C. Hager



A Matt Hunter Adventure

Praise for *Hunter's Secret*

When I finished J. C. Hager's first book, Hunters Choice, I asked the author, "Where's the next one?" I finally got my eyes on Hunter's Secret and got by on little sleep until I'd read it. The locales depicted are bang-on, the human characters are well-crafted and many return as the reader's old friends. Now, John, where's the next one?

Joseph Greenleaf

Publisher, Swordpoint Intercontinental Ltd

Hunter's Secret has action, intrigue, spot-on descriptions, unique Michigan settings....an entertaining and logical sequel to Hunter's Choice.

Aubrey Golden

President, Michigan Karst Conservancy

Praise for J. C. Hager's *Hunter's Choice*

The first Matt Hunter Adventure

John Hager knows the outdoors, he knows the human heart, and best of all he knows how to tell a hell of a story!

Steve Hamilton

author of the Alex McKnight novels

In his debut novel, J. C. Hager has employed his expertise as a hunter to offer us quite a yarn that could probably easily make a great movie...What also shines in the novel is Hager's familiarity with the finer points of all things pertaining to hunting and boating that he cleverly interweaves into his plot.

Norman Goldman

Editor, BookPleasures.com

Superbly crafted, Hunter's Choice documents Hager as a master storyteller whose attention to detail insures the reader's rapt attention from beginning to end.

Midwest Book Review

Hunter's Secret

Also by J. C. Hager
Hunter's Choice



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Wreck of the Carol K

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A Matt Hunter Adventure

**Greenstone Publishing
Rapid River, Michigan**

Hunter's Secret
by J. C. Hager

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To Ann, who does so much



Stuck

Stuck, fouled, hung-up...the anchor was down there and wouldn't be hoisted. Matt Hunter held the half-inch, three-strand nylon line in his hands as he stood wide-legged at the bow. After he and Tanya had spent a half hour using every skill they knew, the anchor still defied their wishes to end the beautiful day on Lake Superior and motor back to harbor.

Finally warm, even sweaty, from exertion and frustration, Matt had donned a hooded sweatshirt and lined jogging pants to bring his body temperature back to normal after a day of jumping in and climbing out of Lake Superior. Three days on the boat had introduced Tanya, a Florida native and expert ocean diver, to the cold, fresh water of Gitche Gumee, the anchor being the only problem yet encountered.

Tanya came forward from her role as helmsman. Just the sight of her barefoot, in cutoff jeans and nylon jacket over a long-sleeved t-shirt, took the disappointment of the moment away and filled Matt with a glow of happiness and love.

Tanya gave him a hug. “We’re out of tricks. Someone needs to suit up and get wet. I’ll make some coffee and watch for sharks.” She ducked under the line that Matt was chocking with both hands and came up inside his arms, pulling his head forward, kissing him and snuggling her head into his chest.

Matt fought for balance as a light afternoon chop made the boat rock slightly. He looked west at the low September sun dancing off the wavelets. “It’s that damn plow anchor, I’ve never liked them—like a big fish hook and hard to store. I should have bought a Danforth, but was too pissed at the cost of filling the gas tank. I bought whole fishing boats for the cost of...”

Tanya kissed him again, “It’s only money, and you’ve worked hard on the house all summer. I love being on a boat again, alone with you. We’ve got two more nights if someone can get his anchor up.” Her eyes sparkling, she quickly ducked under Matt’s arms and worked along the side of the boat to the stern and into the cabin.

Matt felt like cutting the rope and leaving the whole rode and anchor to rot on the bottom. He didn’t want to get into a cold wet suit, then 40- to 50-degree water, but knew it had to be done. He was using the boat for free but had to replace anything broken, and it was Friday afternoon—he wasn’t sure if he could find an open ship chandlery store until Monday in Marquette or Munising. Getting a cab to shop at Gander Mountain or Wal-Mart didn’t sound like a good idea. He let out 50 feet of line, enough for the dive, secured it and worked aft to the cabin.

The generator was running and the microwave dinged as he entered the cabin.

Tanya poured steaming water into a larger plastic pitcher half full of water. “I heated some water to put into your suit, I wouldn’t want anything to get frostbitten.”

Matt put on his cold, wet long underwear, then pulled up, wiggled into, and finally zipped his quarter-inch-thick wet suit. Before putting on the rubber hood, he opened the top zipper and poured in the warm water. It felt like peeing your pants, but it did fight the frostbite Tanya was worried about. He climbed onto the diving platform, put on his tank; it showed over 30 percent full. He had a small needle-nose pliers and a screwdriver secured in the zipper pocket of his buoyancy vest.

“If I can’t get it free, I’ll unscrew the shackle and save the rope and chain.”

Tanya handed him his flippers and mask, “I’ll watch you from the bridge. Be careful.”

Matt held the bottom of the tank attachment and stepped off the platform. The warm water in the suit did its thing and the cold water only slowly seeped in as it warmed to near body temperature. Matt swam under the 34-foot Silverton, noting the twin stainless steel props and the pristine condition of the antifouling paint: a plus for the cold, fresh water that was already making his fingers dumb. He had rubber diving gloves but, if he needed to snip the thin wire that secured the clevis screw, bare hands, even cold ones, would be best.

He grabbed the anchor line and followed it down. The earlier 80-foot visibility had dropped to half that as the sun flattened across the surface. The line went out of his sight as he paused to pressurize. His depth gauge read 40 feet. He could see a large, gray rock shelf before him, with the white anchor line disappearing into the gloom toward it. As he slowly kicked downward, the monotone grayness of the surroundings enhanced the silence and loneliness. The only sound, his breathing and bubbles from the regulator. At 65 feet he saw the anchor chain. Fifteen feet of chain protected the rope from fraying against rocks and kept the line lower in the water, increasing the anchor’s holding power. Matt finally held the chain and pulled himself slowly downward, the cold of the metal almost painful to the touch. At last he saw the damn plow anchor, upside down among several large, gray boulders, and it looked securely linked to a log stuck between two smaller boulders, just like a fish hook. The whole scene formed a shallow cave-like grotto containing rounded gray rocks against a gray rock wall.

With no little satisfaction and with full knowledge of what awaited the successful raising of his anchor when he returned to Tanya, Matt wrestled with the old plow hook. He brought it upward, then sideways, turning it until it came free. He pushed off the offending log in the final struggles. The plow anchor, now free, moved across the rock and stopped of its own weight and the lack of much pull from the boat above. Matt gripped the four—or five-inch-diameter log, a thin coating of slime floated away—he touched uniform and round—hard and cold—metal. The large rock on the right side became a massive anchor fluke.

Matt checked his old Rolex—he had set the bezel to the minute hand when he put the mouthpiece in just before diving. Six minutes of diving so far, now at decompression depths; he didn't have his computer, and if he stayed any longer he would be into repetitive dive calculations. There wasn't much time for fun-and-games with the big anchor. Also, the light was quickly fading.

Matt swam around the fluke, finding the shaft and following it to a large chain: old, forged links led away down the steep slope of the main rock cliff, out of sight. He pulled himself down the links, cold forgotten, adventure and discovery beckoning: each handhold bringing him two feet lower into the darkness. He descended, remembering to breathe steadily, the chain leading down and across the rock wall.

The pressure increased, his ears popping, suit compressing, insulating factor going down, cold increasing, leg muscles starting to cramp from the freezing water. Watch face hard to read—not quite dark enough for the radium dial but too dark to read the hands. He could see the second hand moving—it was comforting to have an instrument working for him down here. Something down there wanted to be found; it called to him. He would descend ten more grips. One, two, three, four, five, six little Indians...

Shit, I'm getting numb and dumb, and dumb is death down here.

Matt turned around and headed slowly back up the chain, returning to the big anchor. Looking up, the water seemed warmer, more light; he breathed easier. Eight feet away lay the plow anchor. He worked at bringing it back; there wasn't much slack, but enough to just hook the plow point over the old anchor. It would hold, but could be freed from the boat.

Matt made two decompression stops and finally threw his swim fins onto the diving platform. Tanya offered him a beach towel, steaming coffee and a very worried look.

"Why so long? I could see you moving down the white anchor chain, then I lost sight of you. I could tell you were going deeper by the bubbles, but you were too long and deep for the anchor work. I was getting my gear on when I saw you coming up and decompressing. Are you alright? What's down there?"

"Adventure and discovery is down there. Let me get warmed up and we can make decisions about what we can do," answered Matt as he

pulled off his gear. Coffee, sugar, brandy and his sweat clothes brought the color back to his lips.

"I found a ship's anchor, followed its chain down another forty feet." Matt went on as he pulled out scrolled maps from an overhead shelf. He pointed with pencil stub. "Here it is, Granite Island, here are the rocks on the west end, here we are, and there is the slope and shelf, then the steep drop-off. Unless we are dealing with just an abandoned anchor and chain, or chain and cable, we may find a sunken ship right about there—in one hundred sixty feet of water and resting against the cliff wall. I went down the anchor chain, it was tight and strained on the rock, going down at an angle toward the cliff face, either there's a hundred yards of chain caught on an outcropping or there is something at the other end."

Tanya brought Matt half a sandwich left from lunch and freshened his coffee. "Are we going in or can we stay over night?"

"It stays light until almost 10:00, so we can think awhile. Check the Coast Guard UHF weather channel, and I'll make a phone call to the marina. I think the southwest wind is going to stay gentle and the lake will be a pond for the next few days. We have shelter from the south and we know our anchor is solid, even though our scope won't be perfect we can let out most of our two hundred feet of line, set a second anchor on the shallow reef and let the GPS be our anchor watch."

"Planning to dive tonight?" she asked.

He shook his head slowly. "Morning would be better. Maybe a short midmorning dive down that anchor. We can figure out how much time we have with the tanks aboard. If there is something down there we will need more and better equipment."

Tanya and Matt busied themselves with weather, diving tables, anchoring and, finally, dinner tasks. They had salad, fresh lake trout fillets, fresh green beans and rice—all with chilled Chablis from a gallon jug kept in the big ice chest. They transported their plates and glasses to the flying deck and enjoyed the view of the desolate rocky island, the soft reds and oranges of the Lake Superior extended sunset, and finally the twilight and evening of the northern latitude.

While Matt did the dishes, Tanya organized the cabin space, loaded the Bunn coffee maker and prepared the forward berth. With the center support in place, covered by the fitting mattress pad, the whole

bow space became a bed. The opened bow hatch framed uncountable stars. The fall moon would soon outshine the stars. The temperature was perfect for their light sleeping bags, which they zipped together. Making love on top of this soft, quilted expanse, they took joy in each other and the freedom of their isolation. The stars watched but didn't comment. The lake, as satisfied as they, slept with them.



The Dive

Tanya's hair touched his shoulder, her breath made regular pulses on his arm. Matt lay on his back, snuggled in the double sleeping bag; he slowly moved from under Tanya's leg and worked his way out of the forward berth area. The moon had traveled west, out of sight, and the sun was just thinking about making them another perfect September day.

Matt slipped into his sweat suit and a pair of Top Sider loafers, took a plastic glass from the drying rack and quietly opened and closed the door to the aft deck area. The large ice chest yielded orange juice and a four-day-old Danish. Glass in hand, roll in mouth, he one-handed the ladder to the bridge.

The seats were all wet with dew, Matt dried off the helm seat, put down another damp towel and swiveled the seat to face the island. A mist had formed over the water and extended onto the island. They anchored 100 yards off the northwest corner and just north of some exposed rocks that framed the west side. The GPS on the bridge had stood silent sentinel all night, ready to buzz if they had moved more

than a few yards. There wasn't a ripple on the water. Matt had patrolled several times during the night to ensure the boat was secure. The anchor line was short for the depth of the anchorage, but hooking to a massive ship's anchor should have eliminated any problems. Matt still worried while being so close to boat eating granite rocks. Lake Superior can change in a hurry, megalithic rocks and some gravel on the bottom are accompanied by many ships and crewmembers offering mute testimony to the dangers that await the freshwater sailor.

Matt sipped the OJ and nibbled on the dry pastry, the reddish pink sky was changing to yellow as the sun fought with the mist. The optimistic, Pollyanna persona he showed to Tanya on these waters, meant to make up for the water temperature, lack of color, plant and animal activity, buoyancy and a hundred other differences from diving in the Keys, were now on hold. Matt felt a foreboding presence; a heavy sinister feeling seemed to accompany the mist he could look down on from his bridge height. He saw movement on the island—birds maybe. He pulled the binoculars from their ledge under the instrument console, wiped them semidry, and scanned the island. Two figures stood on the island facing him, one raised an arm in greeting. Matt couldn't focus the restreaming lenses well enough to see clearly. He wiped, focused and watched intently as the two figures seemed to dissolve with the increasing sunlight and the dissipating morning mist. Looming, it had to be looming, Matt had seen it all his life on the lake waters—different surface temperatures make the air magnify and transpose images. Trees seem to grow from the water, boats to float above the water, and in the winter, ice shacks miles away seem very close in the morning sun.

Matt felt the boat move and heard the coffee pot make its morning burping sound. He kept watching the now clear island as the lake sucked up the last of the mist. He smelled the coffee before the two stainless steel VacuCraft mugs popped up at the top of the ladder, followed by Tanya coming to the bridge.

"Isn't this beautiful?" She handed him a mug. "I do love sleeping on a boat—with you."

He sipped the coffee and nodded. "Me, too."

"You want eggs for breakfast?"

"Sounds good."

She pointed at the binoculars. "What were you looking at?"

"I saw what looked like people on the island, but now they're gone. It must have been shadows or birds." Matt put down the binoculars and took another sip. "Last night I did some checking, we have two full and two low tanks. I'm glad we did as much snorkeling as we did."

Tanya zipped up her down vest and shivered slightly. "Yeah, snorkeling keeps you above the thermocline in that balmy 65-degree water. Ten more feet and you're swimming in the ice age. And you get more exercise snorkeling."

"True enough." He set the mug down.

Tanya took a long drink and said, "I can't believe how preserved all the wrecks are. We even had a hundred-foot visibility a few times—plus no sharks, barracudas, urchins, man-a-war, stinging coral. And if you're thirsty, you can drink the water."

Matt dried the back bench for Tanya and put another damp towel on the seat and back. "The dive computer and I figure we can make about a fifteen-minute dive at one-fifty and have two decompression stops. We can put the two partial tanks at ten feet for backup at the last stage. This will be our deepest and coldest dive. Are you up to it or would you rather we get better suits and go to mixed air?"

"I can make one cold dive, as long as it's warm when I come up." She grinned. "And if I've someone to get my blood flowing again."

After breakfast Tanya made a cell phone call to her parents who were busy doing the finishing work on Matt and Tanya's new home at the quarry, Matt's 360 acre property where they had worked all summer on a retirement home. They checked in everyday when cell phone availability permitted. Their present location twelve miles from Marquette and within sight of the Huron Mountains gave a good signal. Mr. Vega, her father, wanted to talk to Matt.

"Matt?" began George Vega, retired Air Force Tech Sergeant, retired marina owner, diver, fisherman and now consummate carpenter, mechanic, painter and fixer. "I want you to know I'm enjoying myself, the time I lost figuring how to wire this SIP panel stuff is being made up with not having to find studs—the whole place is a stud. I've never worked on a house made of 4x8 panels with insulation between two plywood sheets. The channels for the wiring take some getting used to. I've done almost all the oak trim on the doors, and all the windows are done."

"You've been busy." Matt replied.

Vega laughed. "That's not all. I'll have the floor trim all cut and stained, waiting for the tile and carpet people. I even bought a table saw. Your radial arm is fine, but I like the table for fine trim work."

"Nothing like having the right tool for the job." Matt quipped.

"Indeed. So, you taking care of my only daughter?"

"She's fine, loves boats, says this water is so cold you don't age in it." Matt thought, *over*.

"Well, you won't get me in it." He paused "Tanya's mother told me to tell you that this front room with its cathedral ceiling would make a great place for a wedding. She's over at your aunt's having coffee with the ladies and learning all about your sordid past."

"Which one? Rose, Hawaina or Pearl? I've got three in driving range."

Vega thought a moment, or was waiting for Matt to end the thought, then continued, "The one that makes the great wheat rolls."

"That's Hawaina. She thinks I'm very nice and won't tell about anything bad. Between the three sisters-in-law are families of seven, nine and eleven children. Everybody in the county is related, or probably should be, Anita will learn a lot from those ladies. Would you keep the phone near you this afternoon? We may need some supplies brought to Marquette."

"Sure," said Vega, "I hate leaving all the good projects I've got going, but I could use some things from Menard's I guess."

"Good, here's your daughter."

Matt gave the cell phone to Tanya and went down to the cabin to check the diving computer, their equipment and the charge on the underwater lamps they would carry. He also rigged two spools of braided nylon string, securing strong plastic snaps to their ends and putting a match to the cut ends to eliminate fraying.

Tanya returned to the cabin. "Sorry. My folks are always talking about a wedding. I thought this would keep them happy for a longer time." She held up a multi-carat, princess-cut engagement ring. "The world will never know this was nearly the runt of the litter and we sold a handful of its shiny brothers and sisters to good homes in Nassau."

Matt nodded. "Cashing out the diamonds, expensing the whole Bahama charter and paying tax on the profit seemed the best way to deal with a gift of diamonds from a gangster."

“And it’s nice knowing the money is growing in gold, bonds and the worldwide money market: all offshore, all legal.”

Matt took her hand, kissed her fingers and held the ring in the sunlight streaming in from the window. “Well, I only gave it to you so we could smuggle it into the country. But you do wear it well.”

“Yes, don’t I?”

“Ever wonder how ex-crime boss Mr. Webb, our former captor then benefactor and now cocoa farmer is faring in the Dominican Republic?”

“I showed you the letter from his daughter Carla last week. She just enrolled at the University of Michigan. She thinks everywhere in Michigan is a quick drive and will send us her address in Ann Arbor when she knows it. She’ll be on their gymnastics team and plans to study dancing and drama.”

“She seemed too nice and thoughtful to pick a school so far from her folks just to exasperate them?”

“I agree, her dad wanted her to go to a European girls’ school; it’s ill-advised for him to come to the States. However, I have the feeling we will be seeing Carla and the Webbs again. Your diamond reward for saving his life and the lives of his wife and daughter and helping him escape the long arm of federal law is nice, but the best thing he did was bring us together.”

“As I recall, it was a blizzard and a plane crash that united us, a much more godlike intervention than that of Mr. Webb,” said Matt as he laid out their polypropylene underwear, started the generator, put a pan to heat water on the single hot plate that augmented the electric fry pan. He added, “The sun will be about right in a half hour, we better get cleaned up and ready.”

Almost an hour passed before the two divers were emotionally and physically ready for their deep dive. They rode down on the anchor line, put down another small anchor with the two partially full tanks attached, adding hand and foot loops to help the decompression stage.

The weather was perfect, mid-70s, light wind from the southwest; they dove in the lee of the island and assorted rock outcroppings to its west. They could clearly see the anchor chain at over 60 feet. Matt tried to imagine a ship at the end of the chain, but couldn’t see anything but gray rock.

They used the warm-water procedure, even though they were warm from the sun, suiting, and activity of getting all their paraphernalia and gauges checked. Matt had a small underwater slate and marker—their only means of communication beyond grunts and gestures.

With a final check that all was secure, turned on, calibrated, set, zipped, and their regulator mouth pieces secured by a band around their necks so their soon-to-be very numbed lips wouldn't lose the link to lifegiving air, in they went.

They swam to the second anchor line, checked all their equipment, did a buddy breathing exercise with each other's extra hose, checked the pressure in their main tanks, then swam to the main anchor line and began their decent.

Conditions were as perfect as could be for a Lake Superior dive. The visibility was better than 80 feet—maybe more as the sun got higher. The water temperature was in the 50s, but they anticipated low 40s at their destination. Their only exposed flesh was a few square inches of cheek and lips. They had both been at greater depths than this dive—the only variables were the temperature of the water and freshwater's 3.5% lower density than seawater. They had both adjusted their weights and equipment for this difference.

Inspecting the old anchor gave them time to acclimate to two atmospheres of pressure. The biggest change in water pressure is in the first 30 feet, standard gas volumes are halved, the next 30 feet only halve that again, so it is relatively only a quarter of the initial change, so subsequent depths cause smaller and smaller relative volume changes. Matt watched his suit thickness decrease as the air pockets in the rubber became three-quarters their surface size. He also knew pressure changed his blood. Nitrogen, which makes up nearly 80% of regular air, dissolved into his blood like bubbles in Coke. If he came up too fast the bubbles would form in his vessels and give him the bends, also the air in his lungs would expand like an overfilled balloon and his lung tissues would rupture and bleed or even burst. Then there was the ever-popular nitrogen narcosis, where the nitrogen under pressure combines with oxygen to form nitrous oxide—laughing gas: getting high under water can make you forget all the deadly forces in play around you as you explore a fascinating but deadly environment.

Tanya was the first to break away from the anchor site and head down the big links of chain. Matt caught up with her and together they swam slowly down the rock face, intermittently touching the chain for luck. Matt could see where he had stopped by the disturbed slime on the chain and rocks. They went another 40 feet and the chain lifted off the rock wall. Holding the chain they moved away from the gray rock wall. At the same time they lost sight of the gray-on-gray wall they saw the chain lead into a ship's hawsehole.

Tanya let out an underwater, "Yippee."

The ship was big, they went above the anchor chain, grasping the thick wooden rail, Matt began wiping the film of slime from a carved white and gilt edged name plate—*Carol K* seemed to glow from the disturbed cloud of algae and the light from Matt's diving light, looking up they could clearly see a pilot house. It was gray, with white trim and glass windows, easy to see from 30 feet. The ship's length rested about 30 degrees from vertical, leaning toward the cliff wall and seemed to be in the 200-foot range from what they could see.

Matt's heart raced, Tanya gave him a high-five with her three-finger glove. Matt showed her his watch and depth gauge. They had 15 minutes. He wrote their go-back time on the slate and circled it twice. Tanya checked her watch and nodded. Matt could see the excitement in her eyes. She had an undiscovered ship to explore. A unique adventure she'd never had in her lifetime of diving experiences. Lake Superior was giving her a wonderful treasure.

They went together to the pilot house near the bow, it could be entered from either side, the starboard side was close to the cliff wall and they decided to enter from port. Matt snapped his line on the rail a few feet from the open door to the pilot house, Tanya did the same. They entered. All the control components of a steam vessel were before them. Their lights made the various brass and glass instruments seem to come to life. They noted the telegraph at ALL STOP, the binnacle and wheel were ready for a captain's orders. Charts were still in their pigeonholed wall cabinet. They explored the whole room. There was a doorway on the far bulkhead.

Tanya headed in, Matt reached her, pulling her back and printed, SLOWLY, on his slate. They both knew a submerged room can be a black, silt filled, disorienting death trap. They checked their lines,

Matt motioned he would stay just inside the doorway, and ushered Tanya in.

Tanya entered the cabin, it had a bunk bed, large desk, more chart holders, and various slotted wooden lockers. Tanya opened a locker—foul weather gear, small boots; child or women’s size. She glanced up, their air bubbles were pooling on the ceiling and forward bulkhead, due to the angle of the ship. The growing bubble reflected their lights, the room got brighter. Looking up, both Tanya and Matt spied a box floating lid down at the edge of the air bubble. Matt retrieved it. It was a strong box two and a half feet wide, eight or nine inches high and maybe ten inches deep, fold-out handles at its ends. Tight enough to hold some air, making it float. The sides and top concaved by water pressure.

Matt checked his watch, they had three more minutes. They both searched for booty. Tanya took a parallel rule with writing on it; Matt held the box and felt he would be glad to get it to the surface. Desk drawers were warped shut, and he saw no other easily claimed treasure. There was no ship’s log or material on the desk that readily identified the ship.

They left by mutual agreement and swam over the bow, working forward until they came to the name: *Carol K*. Matt wrote it on the tablet.

They went back to the anchor line and slowly followed it upward.

At the anchor they stopped. Matt showed the box to Tanya, pointing out how the sides were becoming square and straight again. Tanya didn’t understand. Matt went through his best Marcel Marceau effort, finally drawing on the cluttered slate depictions of the expanding box and how it might leak more. It would certainly pop at the surface if they didn’t put it into a waterproof, plastic bag. Matt finally figured Tanya understood he was concerned with the box, but not particularly why. Maybe she thought it would explode.

They went through their decompression stages; Matt motioned for Tanya to stay with the box while he went up and returned with a covering for the box.

With the box tightly double-layered with plastic garbage bags, the two divers bobbed up next to the dive platform.

Tanya pulled out her mouthpiece and effervescently said, “That was the most exciting dive of my life. We have to go back. The ship is huge! How old do you think it is? Let’s get that box open.”

Matt had tied his nylon string to the old anchor, tying the string to the diving platform. "We'll put a float on this."

They got out of their gear, made some coffee, ate peanut butter sandwiches and called Mr. Vega.

"Dad, we found..." Matt took the phone. "Sir, we need your help getting some diving equipment..."

Matt gave George Vega a list of equipment for mixed-gas diving and cold-water dry suits. Also the weekend number of the dive shop owner whom Matt had known for 20 years, explaining that, if the owner wouldn't rent them the equipment for Tanya, Mr. Vega could use his cards and certification to get the equipment. Matt said he would also call the diving shop and talk to them. They agreed to meet the Vegas at the Marquette marina and go to dinner together.

All the time he was talking, he and Tanya looked at the black garbage bags containing the box from the *Carol K*, curiosity taking over all their emotions.

When the cell phone snapped shut, they both raced for the box. Tearing away the wet plastic bags, placing the black box on a towel on the boat's deck, on their knees, they held hands, pausing to savor the moment.

About the Author



Born and raised in Michigan, John (J. C.) Hager earned a B.A. and M.A. in Biology and Science Education from Western Michigan University, taught high school science and coached football and wrestling. He retired from IBM after 27 years on quota. He and his wife Ann live in Michigan's Upper Peninsula on the shore of Little Bay de Noc. They have two grown sons. John dilutes his writing time with hunting, fishing, boating, traveling, and providing laughs and lost golf balls at the Gladstone Golf Club.

The Matt Hunter Adventures

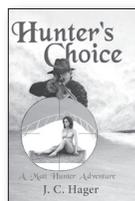
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